

ST. AMBROSE

De Labriolle

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THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ST. AMBROSE

BY

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TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY

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INTRODUCTION

APART from the indications afforded by ecclesiastical writers contemporary with St. Ambrose, especially St. Augustine,¹ our principal sources of knowledge of his character and life are his biography written by the deacon Paulinus, and the works of St. Ambrose himself.²

It was only twenty-five³ years after the death of Ambrose that Paulinus, at the request of St. Augustine, took in hand the compilation of an account of the illustrious Bishop. In ad-

¹ See Ballerini's edition of the works of St. Ambrose, Vol. I, p. xvi sq. (Milan, 1875-1883).

² In the (Greek) Menologies there are two other *Lives* of St. Ambrose, independent of that by Paulinus. One was composed directly from the text of the historian Theodoret, and is to be found in Migne's *Greek Patrology*, Vol. CXVI, 861-882. The second is merely a rearrangement of the first, and is included in the *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. XIV, p. 51 sq. (reprinted in 1879). See Van Ortrov's *Greek Lives of St. Ambrose*, in *Ambrosiana, Scritti Varii Pubblicati nel XV Centenario della Morte di S. Ambrogio*, p. 11 sq., Milan, 1897. These two lives have therefore no original value.

³ Cf. Van Ortrov's *Ambrosiana*, p. 7.

dition to his personal recollections, he had at his disposal the testimony of Marcellina, the sister of Ambrose, and of men entirely worthy of credence (*probatissimi viri*) who had known him personally.⁴ He also went into the miracles which St. Ambrose was credited with having worked during his life-time and after his death. The ambition of Paulinus, as he confesses at the beginning of his work, was to provide a pendant to the *Lives* of St. Antony, St. Paul of Thebes, and St. Martin, by Athanasius, Jerome, and Sulpicius Severus. With such models for his inspiration, it is not surprising that he accentuated chiefly his miraculous cures,⁵ his victories over the Devil,⁶ and the protection extended to him by Heaven and manifested in visible signs.⁷ He also gave a place to legends which had become commonplace, whereby a number of great men were already crowned with a halo—bees coming and laying their honey on the lips of the sleeping child, and grandiloquent prophecies of his future, etc. His desire to edify before all else turned him aside from emphasizing the politi-

⁴ He gives his authorities. § 1.

⁵ See §§ 10, 28.

⁶ See §§ 16, 21, 33, 43.

⁷ See §§ 17, 18, 20, 42.

cal rôle of Ambrose.⁸ In the enhancement of his miracles he is more brief than we could have wished in regard to his virtues.⁹

He takes only slight account of the letters of St. Ambrose,¹⁰ and even then somewhat unskilfully.¹¹ Nevertheless they afford us an inexhaustible mine of information, not only on his times and the great political and religious questions which were then being fought out, but also on himself, his *rôle*, and his activities. And it is around these, without prejudice to his other writings, that we must group the principal facts which will enable us to understand him better.

The exact date of the birth of St. Ambrose

⁸ See §§ 23, 24.

⁹ See §§ 38, 41. The Life of St. Ambrose by Paulinus was translated into Greek. M. Papadopoulos Kerameus published in 1891, at St. Petersburg (now Leningrad), a Greek text which is supposed to go back to the VIIIth or IXth century, from a manuscript of the XIth century found at St. Saba, Jerusalem.

¹⁰ Ninety-one letters have come down to us. Certain indications enable us to state that some have been lost. Those to which we can put a date were written between the years 379 and 396. From a passage in *Ep.*, xlviii, 7 (*P. L.*, xvi, 1203) it is probable that Ambrose made a collection of his letters and arranged them himself in a series.

¹¹ See the remarks of H. Koch, *Histor. Jahrbuch*, p. 268, (1907), as to the manner in which he relates the penance of Theodosius (*Vita S. Ambrosii*, § 24).

is disputed. According to the interpretation given to a passage in Letter LIX, it should be placed in the year 333 or 340.¹² His family was Christian; it was even honoured by having a martyr, the Virgin Sotheris, who had been put to death during the persecution of Diocletian.¹³ Ambrose's father fulfilled the important duties of Pretorian Prefect of the Gauls at Treves.¹⁴ After his death his widow returned to Rome with her three children, Ambrose, Satyrus, and Marcellina, who later on was to take the veil. We know hardly anything of the early youth of Ambrose. Proposing to follow the same *cursus honorum* as his father, he attached himself to the person of Sextus Petronius Probus, Pretorian Prefect of Italy from 368 to 376, and by his skill as an

¹² In *Ep.*, lix, 4, he states that he had completed his fifty-third year. Now the only indication to determine the date of this letter is a passage in the preceding paragraph, where he says: "*Nos autem objecti barbaricis motibus et bellorum procellis in medio versamur omnium molestiarum freto.*" What commotions was he alluding to? Those engendered by the rivalry of Maximus in 387-8, or those following the proclamation of Eugenius as Emperor in 393-4? Here lies the whole question, and it seems insoluble.

¹³ Cfr. *Exhortatio Virginitatis*, xii, 82 (*P. L.*, xvi, 376); *De Virginitus*, III, vii, 38 (*P. L.*, xvi, 244).

¹⁴ There were four *Praefecti Praetorio* for the four portions of the Empire,—the East, Illyria, Italy, and Gaul.

orator so distinguished himself that his powerful protector, after a short period under his own personal direction, did not hesitate to entrust to him the government of the provinces of Liguria and Æmilia, with the title of *Consularis*. Settling in Milan, Ambrose's administration was one of conscientious justice, which drew to him the affection and esteem of all.

The episcopal see of Milan was at this time held by Auxentius, who belonged to the Arian party. When he died, one year after the arrival of Ambrose, and it became necessary to elect a successor, violent disputes arose among the Christians at Milan, some being partisans of Arius, and others adherents of Athanasius. Excited meetings were held in the basilica. Being responsible for public order, Ambrose thought it his duty to attend. "He was haranguing the crowd," his biographer relates,¹⁵ "when the voice of a child suddenly cried out: 'Ambrose bishop!' Every one repeated the cry, and forthwith the wrangling between Arians and Catholics gave place to a marvellous and incredible unanimity." Stupefied and almost annoyed, Ambrose did all he could to escape

¹⁵ *Vita S. Ambrosii*, § 6.

from so unexpected an honour, or at least to defer it. But this impromptu choice seemed to all to be such a happy one, that the bishops hastened to approve it. The Emperor, Valentinian I, ratified it in his turn.¹⁶ Notwithstanding the established ecclesiastical regulations,¹⁷ Ambrose received baptism, and, eight days later, was ordained to the priesthood, on December 7th, 374.

Thus suddenly made a bishop under the pressure of popular enthusiasm, Ambrose found himself in a rather paradoxical position. Without any preliminary knowledge of theology, and with no special training, he was called upon to exercise episcopal authority and "to teach before even having learnt,"¹⁸ as he confesses with his customary modesty.

He had received the usual education of young men of good family in the classic authors and exercises in rhetoric which were

¹⁶ Cfr. *Ep.*, xxi, 7 (*P. L.*, xvi, 1046).

¹⁷ Cfr. *Ep.*, lxiii, 65 (*P. L.*, xvi, 1258).

¹⁸ *De Officiis Ministrorum*, I, 1, 4: "*Ego enim raptus de tribunalibus atque administrationis infulis ad sacerdotium, docere vos coepi quod ipse non didici. Itaque factum est, ut prius docere inciperem quam discere.*" Cf. also *De Paenitentia*, II, viii, 72 (*P. L.*, xvi, 536).

always somewhat artificial and puerile. He had doubtless, like so many others, taken pleasure in rhetoric. A translation into Latin of the *Wars of the Jews* by the historian Flavius Josephus, which he must have done shortly before his elevation to the episcopate,¹⁹ exhibits an endeavour to embellish his model with oratorical features and striking phrases. He was evidently initiated into all the literary secrets which people learnt at that time in the schools,²⁰ and he never unlearned them. Imitations of Virgil, Cicero, Sallust, etc., abound in his writings.²¹ The art of utilising good authors was well taught in the IVth century, and many a writer's proficiency was confined to that. Doubtless he was influenced, too, by the system in vogue at that time in the diffuse developments over which he sometimes

¹⁹ See O. Scholz's *Die Hegesippus-Frage* (Breslau, 1915), and Ussani's edition of this translation, which some refuse to credit to St. Ambrose (Venice, 1922).

²⁰ A great number of significant examples will be found in C. Weyman's article in the *Archiv f. Lateinische Lexikographie*, I, p. 51 sq. (1905).

²¹ Cfr. Ihm in the *Jahrbücher f. Klassische Philologie, Supplementband*, xvii, p. 82 sq. (1890). He quotes literally from Virgil three times (*De Abraham*, I, ix, 82; II, i, 14; *Enarr. in Ps.*, XLIII, xvii): but he uses a number of Virgilian expressions in his prose without keeping to their metrical form.

lingers—a picture of the sea, a description of fields spangled with flowers, circumstantial and more or less fanciful remarks on the habits of animals, etc., or, again, some fantastic story which he relates in detail to point some Christian moral.²²

But this kind of literature, and all these niceties of style, could not equip him to fulfill satisfactorily such a novel task as had been thrust upon him. The very high conception he held of his duties assisted him to appreciate the depths and shallows of a culture that was confined almost solely to words. He set to work, therefore, and his first concern was to read Holy Scripture with assiduity in order to transform it into life-blood and nourishment. Few ecclesiastical writers are so prolific in quotations from the Bible. I would not venture to assert that the modern reader will find them always pertinent and will bear them without impatience. But for Ambrose the Bible was the source of all truth, beauty, and philosophy, including profane philosophy, which he considered as woven from plagiarisms and pilferings from the Scriptures. For him the Holy Book was the sure counsellor in the diffi-

²² See *infra*, Ch. III.

culties of every day, the supreme law to which he continually referred, and which in his eyes excelled every other, since every other law ought to be inspired from it and was of value only when it conformed to its principles. The Old Testament, especially, exercised a decisive influence on his views and attitude.

Ambrose was obliged also to make himself familiar with the workings of Christian thought, either for the purpose of interpreting the Scriptures, or for theological controversy. It is somewhat curious that, notwithstanding his thoroughly practical and realistic turn of mind, which should have drawn him to Western writers, he almost entirely neglected them. It seems he knew nothing of Tertullian²³ or St. Cyprian.²⁴ There is scarcely one western writer, if we except Hippolytus, who attracted

²³ There is some analogy between the *De Noe*, xxv, 92 (Schenkl, I, 478) and the *De Anima* of Tertullian, § 5. But the ideas set forth in this passage are also found in Macrobius, *De Somno Scip.*, I, xiv, 19, and it is probable that Tertullian, Ambrose, and Macrobius have all three drawn them from the same source.—Schermann ("Lateinische Parallelen zu Didymus," in the *Römische Quartalschrift*, 1902, p. 232 sq., 1902) thinks that Ambrose imitated Tertullian's *De Baptismo* in his *De Mysteriis*. He does not, however, bring forward any direct similarity.

²⁴ Cf. Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte*, III, p. 45, note 1.

his attention.²⁵ It was to the East that his sympathies and curiosity went out. He appreciated their superiority from the speculative point of view, and found in them, ready to hand, the weapons which he required to combat the heterodoxy of his day. Philo and Origen were his authorities in matters of exegesis.²⁶ For his moral and dogmatic teaching he applied himself to the most highly regarded Greek ecclesiastical writers of his time,—Athanasius, Basil, Cyril of Jerusalem, Didymus, Epiphanius, and Gregory of Nazianzus, eagerly mastering their writings, even those which had only just appeared. Thus we find him, in his *De Spiritu Sancto*, which dates from the first half of the year 381, utilising the theological discourses of Gregory Nazianzen, which had been delivered at Constantinople in 380.²⁷

In this way, by unremitting study of the Sacred Books and the best Greek and Hellenistic theologians, he succeeded in laying the foundations of the knowledge which he needed. It was somewhat lacking in order, but in de-

²⁵ See further on, Ch. II.

²⁶ See further, Ch. II.

²⁷ Cf. Schermann's *Die Griechischen Quellen in Ambros. de Spiritu Sancto*, p. 92, Munich, 1902.

fault of any marked originality it gave evidence of a remarkable faculty for assimilation. The constant practice of speaking in public obliged him to filter and clarify this adventitious theology for the use of those whom he was instructing, and thanks to his labours in adaptation, he finally made it his own.²⁸

His catechetical instructions at the same time provided him with the material for nearly all his works. After having delivered them, he wrote them out, either from his own notes, or from memory, or from a report taken down in shorthand. He verified the subject matter and filled in the gaps, and after some slight revision the book was finished. From the point of view of art this was clearly a dangerous method, for how could he have avoided, in his final copy, some of the disconnectedness that

²⁸ As regards the theology of Ambrose, see the general review by Förster, *Ambrosius, Bischof von Mailand*, pp. 123–175 (Halle, 1884), and the more recent monographs by Niederhuber, *Die Lehre des hl. Ambrosius vom Reiche Gottes auf Erden* (in the *Forschungen* of Ehrhard and Kirsch, IV, 3–4), Mainz, 1904; and *Die Eschatologie des hl. Ambrosius* (the same collection, VI, 3), Mainz, 1907. These theologians especially praise St. Ambrose's gift of assimilating and reconsidering the ideas obtained in reading. Cfr. Niederhuber's *Die Eschatologie*, p. 9. On certain points, transubstantiation for instance, he even opened the way to important progress.

is legitimate in a sermon, or the commonplace banter which amuses a pious audience,²⁹ or the venturesome metaphors permitted in extempore addresses? However, Ambrose remained faithful to this method to the end of his career; it economised precious time, and when it was not prejudicial to edification—his sole aim—it mattered little to him that a few hypersensitive people criticised it.

He would have considered it unworthy of himself and of his office to confine his ambitions to writing fine books. His remarkable aptitude as a jurist, orator, and administrator, predisposed him to practical activity. The work of guiding souls and utilising men and circumstances for the good of the Church, formed the domain which was the most congenial to him, and in which his labours were most fruitful.

There were not wanting external advantages which helped him to show his strong personality. The episcopal see of Milan shared in the prestige of the city itself,³⁰ for Milan had be-

²⁹ See the closing of the second day in the *Exaëmeron*, II, 22 (Schenkl, I, p. 59).

³⁰ Cf. C. Cipolla, *Della Giurisdizione Metropolitana della Sede Milanese nella Regione di Venetia ed Istria, in Ambrosiana*

come, at the end of the IIIrd century, the second city in the West, after Rome. The poet Ausonius vaunts the beauty of its buildings, its circus, its theatre: "At Milan," he declares, "everything was worthy of admiration, *Mediolani mira omnia*." ³¹ One of the two *Vicarii* ³² of Italy had his seat there. Constantine had signed his famous edict of tolerance at Milan in 313. Valentinian lived there, and whenever the circumstances of the Empire permitted, Valentinian II and Theodosius. It was a singular piece of good fortune for Ambrose to be thus in almost constant contact with the lords of the Roman world.

On the other hand, the functions of a bishop had not ceased to grow in importance since the Empire had become Christian. Apart from his sacred duties, a bishop exercised a fatherly jurisdiction over his flock, such as St. Paul

(Milan, 1897). For the previous history of the diocese see Savio, *Gli Antichi Vescovi d'Italia dalla Origine al 1300, descritti per regione; Il Piemonte* (Turin, 1899). The first bishop of Milan to whom we can assign a date, is Mirocles (313-314.) He had five predecessors.

³¹ *Ordo Urbium Nobilium*, vii (Peiper, p. 146).

³² Italy was administered by two *Vicarii*, one at Rome (*Vicarius in urbe*, or *urbis*), the other at Milan (*Vicarius Italiae*). Cfr. Marquardt's *Organisation de l'Empire Romain*, translated by Lucas and Weiss, Vol. II, p. 29 (1902).

had so earnestly recommended to the faithful at Corinth.³³ To refer matters to his arbitration was a means of avoiding costly litigation, while at the same time assuring a decision of inviolable equity. The verdict of the bishop in cases like this had only the value which Roman law assigned to "compromise."³⁴ But quite a different, and very flattering prerogative was recognised by the Christian emperors as belonging to the bishops.³⁵ A law, the exact date of which is not known, gave to plaintiffs the right to carry their complaints before the bishop, even when the civil judge had already entered upon the examination of the case.³⁶ Finally Theodosius, in a law promulgated in

³³ *First Corinthians*, vi, 1-4. The text is mentioned by St. Ambrose in *Ep.*, lxxxii, 3 (*P. L.*, xvi, 1332).

³⁴ Cfr. Cuq, *Les Institutions Juridiques des Romains*, Vol., II, p. 886 (1902).

³⁵ For the civil competence of bishops, see a short note by Edouard Cuq, read at the Congress of Rome in 1903 (*Atti del Congresso di Scienze Storiche*, ix, 345).

³⁶ *Cod. Theod.*, I, xxvii, 1 (ed. Mommsen and Meyer, I, ii, p. 62): "*Iudex pro sua sollicitudine observare debebit ut, si ad episcopale iudicium provocetur, silentium accommodetur et, si quis ad legem Christianam negotium transferre voluerit et illud iudicium observare, audiat, etiamsi negotium apud iudicem sit inchoatum, et pro sanctis habeatur, quidquid ab his fuerit indicatum: ita tamen, ne usurpetur in eo, ut unus ex ligantibus pergat ad supra dictum auditorium et arbitrium*

384,³⁷ clearly laid down that every ecclesiastical offence committed by bishops or clerics falls under the jurisdiction of the episcopal, and not of the secular, courts.

Chateaubriand, in a passage in his *Études Historiques* (*Étude V*), has brought out clearly the amplitude of the rôle of a bishop in the IVth century, and the manifold duties which he was required to perform. "There is nothing more complete or well filled than the life of the prelates of the IVth century. A bishop baptised, acted as confessor, preached, prescribed public and private penances, issued anathemas and lifted excommunications, visi-

sum enuntiet. Iudex enim præsens causae integre habere debet arbitrium, ut omnibus accepto latis pronuntiet." This constitution is taken from Sirmond's collection, and in editions prior to Mommsen's bears the *scriptio*: "*dat. IX kal. Maias. Constantinopoli, Licinio et Crispo Caes. coss.*" The date should therefore be 318. But two reasons make this doubtful: *Constantinopoli* is suspect at this date, and *Licinio* is not found in the two most ancient manuscripts, that of Berlin of the VIIIth century, and that of Paris of the Xth century. What is certain is that the constitution is Constantine's. The heading proves it, and this proof is confirmed by a later constitution, addressed in 331 (or 333) to the Prefect Ablabius. In the text of this the Emperor modifies one point of his previous decision, and in another instance defines the interpretation of a clause which had raised a difficulty.

³⁷ Cf. Rauschen, *Jahrb. der Christl. Kirche*, pp. 174 and 486 (1897).

ted the sick, ministered to the dying, buried the dead, ransomed captives, gave relief to the poor, assisted the widows and orphans, founded hospitals and lazar-houses, administered the goods of his clergy, adjudicated as a justice of the peace in private suits, and arbitrated the quarrels between cities. At the same time he published treatises on morality, discipline and theology, wrote against heresiarchs and philosophers, interested himself in science and history, dictated letters to people consulting him on questions of religion, corresponded with churches and bishops, monks and hermits, sat in councils and synods, was called in by emperors to advise them, was charged with business affairs, and was dispatched to usurpers and barbarian princes to disarm or restrain them: three powers—religious, political, and philosophical—were thus concentrated in the bishop.”

There is no doubt that the life of St. Ambrose provided Chateaubriand with most of the traits of this picture, which is hardly an exaggerated one.³⁸ But what constitutes a special feature of his life, is the *rôle* he played in the

³⁸ This is proved by what follows the passage quoted.

councils of Gratian, Valentinian II, and Theodosius. For nearly twenty years, from 378 to 397, the date of his death, he distributed imperial favours and was the counsellor of emperors, and on more than one occasion lent the aid of his diplomacy and the support of his influence to their authority, when it was in peril. The favour which he enjoyed, however well justified though it was, doubtless had its eclipses. It could not fail to exasperate all those who wished to monopolise the imperial court to the exclusion of Ambrose. But the bishop victoriously passed through these dangerous crises. He had made himself too formidable, from the close solidarity which united him to his flock, to be easily set at nought or put aside.

How could Gratian, Valentinian, or Theodosius, responsible as they were for the future and prosperity of the Empire, have underrated the absolute devotion which inspired the fervour of the bishop's patriotism? The interests they represented were as dear to him as they were to themselves, and with them he suffered the first blows directed against the majesty of Rome.³⁹

³⁹ Cf. *De Fide*, ii, 136 sq. (*P. L.*, xvi, 611). It is interesting to note that, in spite of his hostility to the principle of usury,

The cult of the *Respublica* was closely knit up with his faith. In common with many other philosophical minds of his period, Rome seemed to him to have fulfilled a kind of providential mission in grouping together all the nations into one, thereby facilitating the universal diffusion of Christianity. The divine intervention in the destinies of the Empire appeared to him to be as clear as day when he proved that those portions wherein the power of Rome was growing weaker were precisely those in which Arianism had already shaken the faith.⁴⁰ His collaboration with Gratian, Valentinian, and Theodosius created in his mind a glorious image of a Christian Empire in which Church and State would give each other mutual support, and of which the Catholic faith would form the cement. "O sacred Nail," he later exclaimed in his funeral oration to Theodosius (alluding to the nail of

Ambrose authorises its use against a defeated enemy, as a right of war, but on the condition that the victim was not a Christian, or a Roman. (Cf. *De Tobia*, xv, 51; Schenkl, ii, 548): ". . . frater autem tuus omnis, fidei primum, deinde Romani iuris est populus." (See also *Expos. Ev. Luc.*, iv, 46; Schenkl, iv, 161).

⁴⁰ *De Fide*, ii, 139: ". . . ut ibi primum fides Romano imperio frangeretur, ubi fracta est Deo."

the Cross which Helena had sent to Constantine to set in his diadem), "O blessed Nail holding this Roman Empire to which the entire universe gives its allegiance and serves to adorn the brow of sovereigns, *ut sint prædicatores, qui persecutores esse consueverunt!*"⁴¹ Dying in 397, the supreme disillusion of the taking of Rome by Alaric was spared him. He was able to cherish to the end his grandiose dream which the invasions of the barbarians were so cruelly to destroy.

But his strongest quality with the emperors was his goodness. It is curious to observe to what a degree he was able to inspire confidence in his suspicious masters. Brought up on the teachings of that old puerile rhetorician, Ausonius, Gratian was amazed at such uprightness, at such a clear and lofty view of life. He was glad to consider Ambrose as a guide and father, and lost no opportunity of showing him the most affectionate deference. Valentinian II, who as a child had been unfavourably prejudiced against Ambrose by his mother Justina, recognised how greatly he had been deceived, as soon as he was of an age to judge for himself. In the dreadful anguish

⁴¹ *P. L.*, xvi, 1465.

of the days which preceded his assassination, when he felt the blow approaching, all his thoughts and hopes turned towards Ambrose. He implored Ambrose to come to him, and was disconsolate at not seeing him arrive. And as regards Theodosius, if his own experience and maturity left less room for such touching and youthful affection, it may be said that no friendship was more vigorously loyal than that which united him to the Bishop of Milan. It is abundantly true that this man of peace and self-abnegation, who was so ready to give of himself and so lavish of his services, made himself indispensable to others by his manifest disinterestedness.

The good for which he so eagerly strove was not for himself, but for the Church. We shall see from reading the documents translated in the first portion of this work, what he understood by that. Let it suffice to remark here that his religious policy had a threefold object. First, to protect the Church from all violence and all indiscretion on the part of the State. In his view the Emperor had no right either to lay hands on the sacred edifices or to pronounce on matters of faith in place of the bishops (*"in causa fidei, in causa, inquam,*

fidei, episcopos solere de imperatoribus Christianis, non imperatores de episcopis iudicare."⁴² Next, to compel the civil power to respect the moral law even in acts possessing no specifically religious character, under pain of incurring the censure of the Church. This latter principle inspired his action in the affair of Thessalonica. Lastly, to cement a close union between Church and State in such wise that, far from placing the different cults on the same footing, the State should show its special and sole favour towards the Catholic faith, and discourage all other religions.

Was it the view of Ambrose that official action in regard to dissenting beliefs should take the form of a more or less persecuting proselytism? His conduct in the matter of the Priscillianists furnishes us with some useful indications of his attitude. Ambrose was not favourably disposed towards Priscillian and his disciples. When the heresiarch went to Italy in an endeavour to prove to Pope Damasus and other important personalities the absolute rectitude of his doctrines, the Bishop of Milan preserved the utmost reserve. In spite of the

⁴² *Ep.* xxi, 4 (*P. L.*, xvi, 1046).

protestations of orthodoxy multiplied by Priscillian, he considered him suspect from the point of view of the faith.⁴³ But he was indignant at the obstinate determination shown by certain bishops to obtain from the Emperor sentence of death against him and his partisans,⁴⁴ on the grounds of magic and immorality, while in reality it was for heresy. And the putting to death of the accused was no less a scandal to him than it was to St. Martin,⁴⁵ and even to the pagans.⁴⁶

He sharply brands their inhumanity in a letter⁴⁷ instancing the moral problem offered by Christ's pardon of the woman taken in adultery. "This oft-disputed question," he writes, "has become a still more burning one since bishops have set themselves to accuse before the State tribunals men on whom lay the gravest incriminations; while some have followed

⁴³ "*Devios licet a fide.*" (*Ep.*, xxiv, 12; *P. L.*, xvi, 1083).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ A. Regnier, *Saint Martin*, p. 153 sqq. (Paris, 1907).

⁴⁶ The Gaulish rhetorician, Latinus Drepanius Pacatus, in his *Panegyric of Theodosius* (Baehrens, *Panegyrici Latini*, p. 217 sqq.) denounces those bloodthirsty bishops "who themselves were present at tortures and went to feast their eyes and ears on the sufferings and groans of the accused."

⁴⁷ *Ep.* (xxv); § 3 (*P. L.*, xvi, 1086).

them up even to the sword and to the extreme penalty, others have given their approval to such proceedings and to the bloody triumph of these bishops. Is their contention other than that of the Jews when they say that criminals should be punished in accordance with the laws of the State, and that consequently even the bishops must accuse before the civil tribunals those who, they declare, must be punished according to law? The case is precisely similar, . . . but Christ did not suffer one woman to be punished according to law; these others declare that the number of those punished was too few."

Thus he did not admit that bishops should forget their ministry of peace to the point of petitioning for the shedding of the blood of the guilty. Was it because he considered the affair of the Priscillianists as specifically a religious one and because he was opposed to the intrusion of the civil power in a question of this kind? Such a point of view was foreign to him. If he blamed Itacius, Hydatius, and their partisans, it was because the bloodthirsty zeal they displayed seemed to him to be as far removed as was possible from the spirit of the Gospels and from the character of a bishop. Violence,

even when lawful, was abhorrent to him,⁴⁸ all the more so when the ministers of God constituted themselves the agents of it.

It seems equally certain that it would have been repugnant to him to solicit the support of the civil power to do violence to men's consciences and to constrain them to become Catholic. His view was that conversions did not come about by the exercise of force, but were the work of gentleness and goodness. In the treatise *De Fide*,⁴⁹ written for the Emperor Gratian, he says:—"Let us too [who are in the image of Christ] exercise a moral action. Let us convince them [he was speaking of the Arians] of their real interests. Again 'let us weep before the Lord that made us' (Ps. xciv, 61. Our aim is not to oppress, but to heal. We do not prepare pitfalls; we give counsels of piety. Oft-times gentleness bends a man with whom neither force nor reason could be successful. When the Lord healed the man who fell among the robbers whilst going down from Jericho, it was not by means of the too violent

⁴⁸ See Letter XXV (*P. L.*, xvi, 1083). While recognising the necessity of judicial penalties he lays stress on the higher quality of clemency.

⁴⁹ II, xi, 89 (*P. L.*, xvi, 603).

remedies of the law, nor with the sternness of a prophet, but with oil and wine [cfr. Luke x, 34]. Let them who desire to be healed, come to Him, let them receive the remedy that came down from the Father, prepared in Heaven from immortal juices!"

Ambrose, therefore, was clearly hostile to active measures against heterodoxy on the part of the State, taken with the view to constrain men individually to amend their ways and enter into the bosom of the Church.

But on the other hand, this respect due to the consciences of individuals, was limited in Ambrose's mind and faith by the necessity of arresting the diffusion of error and employing all legitimate means of prevention to this end. He was far from holding that a Christian State should remain indifferent in the midst of differing doctrines, and should allow men's minds full liberty to dispute about them. In his eyes the great advantage of an intimate relation between the State and the Church was to place religion in a privileged and carefully guarded position, like everything else that formed a part of constituted public order. Of the laws passed in the matter of religion, by Gratian, Valentinian II, and Theodosius,

there appear to be hardly any that provoked his protest. It is highly probable that he rejoiced over the greater number of them, and that some were personally recommended by him. Now the purport of these measures was nothing less than to prevent heretics from holding meetings⁵⁰ and building churches,⁵¹ to deprive certain sects of the right of giving evidence on oath,⁵² and to forbid every kind of open profession of the pagan religion,⁵³ culminating in total interdiction thereof,⁵⁴ while the Catholic religion enjoyed various immuni-

⁵⁰ Laws of the 22nd April, 378 (*Cod. Theod.*, xvi, v, 4); of the 3rd August, 379 (*Cod. Theod.*, xvi, v, 5); of the 10th Jan., 381 (*Cod. Theod.*, xvi, v, 6); of the 8th May, 381 (*Cod. Theod.*, xvi, v, 7); of the 25th July and 3rd Sept., 383 (*Cod. Theod.*, xvi, v, 11 and 12); of the 20th June, 383 (*Cod. Theod.*, xvi, v, 10); cfr. the 10th March, 388 (*Cod. Theod.*, xvi, v, 14); of the 11th June, 388 (*Cod. Theod.*, xvi, v, 15); of the 20th May, 391 (*Cod. Theod.*, xvi, v, 20); of the 9th July, 394 (*Cod. Theod.*, xvi, v, 24).

⁵¹ Law of the 19th July, 381 (*Cod. Theod.*, xvi, v, 8).

⁵² Law of the 2nd and 8th May, 318 (*Cod. Theod.*, xvi, vii, 1 and V, 7); of the 20th and 21st May, 381 (*Cod. Theod.*, xvi, vii, 2 and 3); of the 5th May, 389 (*Cod. Theod.*, xvi, v, 17); of the 17th June, 389 (*Cod. Theod.*, xvi, v, 18).

⁵³ Law of the 20th December, 381 (*Cod. Theod.*, xvi, x, 12); Law of Gratian, 382; of the 25th May, 385 (*Cod. Theod.*, xvi, x, 9); of the 24th Feb. 391 (*Cod. Theod.*, xvi, x, 10).

⁵⁴ Law of the 8th Nov. 392 (*Cod. Theod.*, xvi, x, 12); of the 7th Aug. 395 (*Cod. Theod.*, xv, x, 13).

ties,⁵⁵ and was even proclaimed officially to be the only true one.⁵⁶

Note, however, that the Roman government, rigorous as it showed itself against the non-conforming bodies, maintained a genuine liberalism as regards persons. Thus high pagan officials were never removed from their ministries if they showed they were doing their duty, and St. Ambrose was the first to give them his support whenever he could.⁵⁷

It would certainly be an exaggeration to approve *en bloc* of all the initiatives taken by Ambrose in the politico-religious concerns with which he had to deal. We will state the reservations it is necessary to make as the occasion arises. But we cannot fail to recognise his genuine desire for moderation and equity, nor, in a special degree, the good services he rendered to the emperors as an administrator. It was an excellent thing that, far from hankering after political domination, he raised

⁵⁵ Of the 5th July, 379 (*Cod. Theod.*, xiii, 1, 11); of the 31st March, 381 (*Cod. Theod.* xvi, ii, 26); of the 9th Dec. 382 (*Cod. Theod.* xi, xvi, 15).

⁵⁶ *Cod. Theod.*, xvi, v, 5. Cf. *Droit Pénal Romain*, transl. by Duquesne from Mommsen. Vol. II, p. 303.

⁵⁷ See the letters of Symmachus to Ambrose in Seeck's edition, *Monum. Germ. Histor., Auctores Antiq.*, CVI, i, pp. 80 and 82, and the introduction, p. CXXVIII.

against the all-powerful emperors another power strong enough, although unarmed, to oppose a moral check, and to compel them to acknowledge their faults. It was through him that the people came to know the sheltering guardianship which the Church could afford them against caprices and violence. "Though other perils were now coming—the terrors of invasion and conquest, and the flood of over-running barbarians which was to carry away all the dykes, and swamp every authority held in awe but yesterday—the right direction had been given; men knew whence might come their defence, from what quarter hope and confidence might spring up again." ⁵⁸

St. Ambrose's name was surrounded in Christian antiquity, in the West as well as in the East,⁵⁹ with a particular veneration, well merited by many services rendered to the Catholic cause. One has only to run through the list of *testimonia* collected in modern editions⁶⁰ to realise that he was considered, even by his

⁵⁸ De Broglie, *Saint Ambroise*, p. 161.

⁵⁹ Cf. Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte*, II, p. 9, note 4. He remarks that after St. Cyprian, St. Ambrose was the Western writer who enjoyed the greatest authority in the East.

⁶⁰ Ballerini's especially, Vol. I.

contemporaries, as "a pillar of the Church," "the pearl glistening on the finger of God," and "the flower of Latin writers." St. Jerome is almost the only one to make a few reservations or, perhaps, ironical remarks about him.⁶¹ In the eyes of St. Augustine, on the contrary,

⁶¹ In his *Chronica* (written 379-381) Jerome wrote one laudatory sentence on Ambrose: "After the death of Auxentius, Ambrose having been made Bishop of Milan, the whole of Italy adopted the true faith." But in the following years a change came over him, the reasons for which we do not know. He, so prodigal of laudatory epithets in his *De Viris Illustribus* (392), now gives Ambrose only a brief and dry notice: "*Ambrosius, Mediolanensis episcopus, usque in præsentem diem scribit, de quo, quia superest, meum iudicium subtraham, ne in alterutram partem aut adulatio in me reprehendatur aut veritas*" (§ 124). On the other hand, Rufinus formally reproaches Jerome for having decried a man so worthy of admiration as Ambrose (*Ap. II* in *Hieronymum*, II, 21; *P. L.*, xxi, 602). It appears probable that Rufinus is here alluding to the preface to Jerome's translation of the *De Spiritu Sancto* by Didymus, written at the request of Pope Damasus (*P. L.*, xxiii, 103). In it Jerome says: "*Malui alieni operis interpres existere quam (ut quidam faciunt), informis cornicula, alienis me coloribus adornare. Legi dudum cuiusdam libellum de Spiritu Sancto et, juxta Comici sententiam, ex graecis bonis latina vidi non bona. Nihil ibi dialecticum, nihil virile atque districtum, etc.*" These lines were written between the years 388 and 391. St. Ambrose's treatise, *De Spiritu Sancto*, dates from 381. This is not the only attack upon Ambrose made by Jerome. See Grützmacher's *Hieronymus*, Vol. II, pp. 64, 75 sqq. and 167, and Stolz's *Didymus, Ambrosius, Hieronymus*, in the *Theologische Quartalschrift*, of Tübingen, Vol. LXXXVII (1905), p. 371.

Ambrose never lost that devout and tender prestige with which from the first day he knew him, his disciple eagerly endowed him.⁶² Augustine in his numerous polemics set much store by his opinions and writings, and while he refused to those of his adversaries, whom he judged to be insufficiently orthodox, the right to quote St. Ambrose,⁶³ he indefatigably utilised that "*excellentem Dei dispensatorem, quem veneror ut patrem.*"⁶⁴ A few centuries later St. Ambrose, together with St. Jerome, St. Gregory, and St. Augustine, were numbered among the Doctors of the Church, who, as we know, at first were four in number.⁶⁵

Read consecutively to-day, his works offer—let me say it frankly—far less interest than those of St. Augustine or St. Jerome. He had neither the depth of the one nor the ardent imagination, the passionate *verve*, and schol-

⁶² See Baunard's *Histoire de Saint Ambroise*, pp. 359 sqq. (Paris, 2nd ed., 1872).

⁶³ Cfr. *De Gratia Christi contra Pelagium et Caelestium*, § 42.

⁶⁴ *Contra Julianum Haeresis Pelagianae Dispensatorem*, I, iii, 10.

⁶⁵ "*Veluti quattuor flumina paradisi.*" *Joannis Monachi Liber de Miraculis* (viii/ix cent.), Hoferer's ed., p. 47 (Würzburg, 1884).

arly aptitude of the other. As a writer of literature he was distinctly of the second order. At the same time it was not in his books that he concentrated his activity nor his best self. To consider only that side of him would be unfair. We must piece together that harmonious and well-ordered life; we must study the age in which he lived, and from the history of those troubled times we shall see his figure stand forth little by little with virile attraction. It was in vain that he went to the Greek school for the formation of his intellect; his character and habits were Roman. Energy of will, perseverance in purpose, the spirit of discipline, the perception of what was practical and capable of being realised—Ambrose possessed all these gifts of Roman genius, and carried them to the highest point of intensity and enlightenment.

The principal edition of St. Ambrose's works was published at Venice in 1485. No decided progress in the constitution of the text and in the critical study of the chronological data furnished by it had been made before the edition of the Benedictines Frische and le Nourry, published in Paris between

1686 and 1690.⁶⁶ This edition was reproduced by Migne in his *Patrologia Latina*, Vols. XIV to XVII, Paris, 1845.⁶⁷ It likewise served as the basis of Ballerini's edition, published in Milan between 1875 and 1883.⁶⁸ Ballerini was content to collate a few Milanese manuscripts. On the other hand he was wrong in admitting certain writings as authentic—in particular the famous commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul, called the *Ambrosiaster*,⁶⁹ which critics rightly reject as spurious. On the whole, without going so far as to call his edition “detestable,” as some learned men have not shrunk from doing,⁷⁰ we must agree that it is decidedly mediocre.

Through the labours of Schenkl a large portion of the exegetic treatises of St. Ambrose have found a place in the *Corpus* of Vienna, Vol. XXXII, parts I and II (1897), and

⁶⁶ Republished at Venice, 1738–1751, in 4 vols., and in 8 vols. 1781–1778.

⁶⁷ We should note that the re-impression of 1879 has a different pagination from that of 1845. Both are full of typographical errors.

⁶⁸ 6 vols.

⁶⁹ Cf. Ballerini, iii, 351.

⁷⁰ See Dom Morin in the *Revue Bénédictine*, xvi, p. 414 (1899).

part IV (1902).⁷¹ We must finally mention the special edition of the *De Officiis* by Krabinger (Tübingen, 1857), with critical notes, and Schenkl's edition of the first book of the *De Excessu Fratris Satyri*, in the collection of minor *Ambrosiana*, published in Milan in 1897.

The extracts from St. Ambrose included in the present work have been translated from Migne's *Patrology* (the 1879 re-impression), with the exception of the exegetic writings, for which I have followed Schenkl's edition.

The most important articles and detailed studies published on St. Ambrose in recent years will be given in the notes. Here I will simply mention the essential works on our author: Tillemont's *Mémoires pour servir à l'Etude de l'Histoire Ecclésiastique*, Vol. X, p. 78 (1705), which still remains a trustworthy and indispensable guide; A. Baunard's *Histoire de Saint Ambroise*, 2nd edition (1872), the skilful arrangement and literary merits of which have made its success; critical considerations have been relegated therein to a secon-

⁷¹ For remarks on the progress realised by Schenkl in the reconstruction of the text, see Jülicher in the *Theol. Literaturzeitung*, pp. 45 sqq. (1898).

dary place; Th. Förster's *Ambrosius, Bischof von Mailand: eine Darstellung seines Lebens und Wirkens*, Halle (1884)—the best monograph on St. Ambrose so far—; and the Duc de Broglie's *Saint Ambroise* (collection *Les Saints*, Paris, 1899), in which Ambrose's activities are excellently described.⁷²

As regards the chronology of his life and writings, Ihm⁷³ has set forth with much sagacity the results obtained by the Benedictines. Rauschen's *Jahrbücher der Christlichen Kirche unter Theodosius dem Grossen* (Freiburg 1897), is very valuable.

A good monograph on the language of St. Ambrose is still wanting. A few summary remarks may be found in Norden's *Die Antike Kunstprosa*, Vol. II (Leipzig, 1898), in Engelbrecht's *Studien über den Lukas-Kommentar des Ambrosius* (*Sitzungs-Berichte d. phil.-hist. Klasse der K. Akad. der Wiss. zu Wien*, Vol. CXLVI (1903), VIII Abt., p. 17; ⁷⁴ in

⁷² See, however, the reservations made in the *Analecta Bollandiana*, Vol. XVIII, p. 190-1.

⁷³ *Jahrbücher für Klassische Philologie, Supplementbd.*, XVII, (1890).

⁷⁴ I am only acquainted with Francesco Lora's *Saggio Sintatico Comparativo su Girolamo, Agostino, Ambrogio* (Padua, 1900) from the point of view of bibliography.

Fr. Cannata's *De Syntaxi Ambrosiana in Libris qui Inscribuntur de Officiis* (1911); and in Morawski's *De Scriptor. Rom. III et IV post Christum Natum Saeculi Observationes* (Cracow, 1921).

CHAPTER I

THE POLITICAL LIFE OF ST. AMBROSE

THE close relations that existed between St. Ambrose and the Emperor Gratian began when the latter, a young man of gentle nature but weak character, found himself under the necessity of coming to most important decisions. The Goths had appeared before Valens, who was then reigning over the Eastern portion of the Roman Empire at Constantinople, and, threatened by the Huns, had demanded an asylum on imperial territory. Valens, not daring to give a formal refusal, had granted their request on condition that they should lay down their arms at the frontier and become Arians. They readily promised the latter, but forgot the former, and soon spread themselves over the land even up to the gates of Constantinople, laying waste everything in their progress. In his desperation Valens could see no other course than to beg the assistance of Gratian. After some hesitation Gratian prom-

ised to come to his aid. But before he could do so, he was apprised of the terrible disaster which had befallen the Roman army. Valens had imprudently attacked the Goths on the plains of Adrianople. His troops were defeated, and he himself, carried wounded to a hut, perished amid flames, August 9th, 378. Discouraged by the immensity of the task which devolved upon him, Gratian then conceived the idea, which was to prove fortunate for the Empire, of associating with himself in imperial power Theodosius, the son of a general whom Valentinian had disgraced and put to death.

On the eve of starting for the East, Gratian felt some misgivings. How was he to know the proper course to pursue in the midst of the theological disputes let loose by Arianism in those countries? He called to mind the esteem professed by his father for the Bishop of Milan, and asked Ambrose to instruct him in the faith. In compliance with this request Ambrose wrote the *De Fide*.

From the year 380 Gratian stayed frequently at Milan, and his intimacy with Ambrose became so close that the latter obtained a remarkable ascendancy over him. We note

that, in 380, or at the beginning of 381, the Bishop secured the restoration to him of a basilica which had been sequestrated for the use of the Arians.

His influence was to show itself in a still more decisive manner in the famous affair of the Altar of Victory, which we will follow throughout its vicissitudes.

THE ALTAR OF VICTORY

In the year 382 the Emperor Gratian energetically resumed the struggle against paganism which had been suspended during the eighteen years of the reign of Valentinian I. An edict withdrew from the priests and vestals the enjoyment of their revenues. The allocations allowed to them for the exercise of their religion were suppressed in favour of the treasury; likewise the vested funds which these colleges had received from legacies. They were forbidden to hold any real estate from that day forward.¹ They were also deprived of the privilege of immunity. And the culminating point of their grievances was reached when

¹ See Duchesne's explanation of these different measures in his *Histoire Ancienne de l'Eglise*, Vol. II, p. 633 sqq.

Gratian ordered the removal of the famous Statue of Victory, which had been brought from Tarentum after the capture of that city, and placed by Augustus in the Curia of Julius Caesar, on the top of an altar.

This measure aroused the indignation of the pagans. They could not misunderstand the meaning of such an act, which conveyed nothing less than the refusal of all official subsidy to the pagan religion, and by this open breach of the ancient alliance existing between religion and the State, the preparation of still more exterminating projects against their beliefs. This outrage to the Altar of Victory—the symbol of Rome's great past and the pledge of her future prosperity—wounded them profoundly. The pagan senators resolved to draw up a protest praying the Emperor for the revocation of his decrees. But the deputation, which numbered in its ranks Symmachus, one of the most distinguished and sympathetic representatives of the pagan party, was not received by Gratian. The Christian senators, who formed a majority in the Curia,² had

² This is disputed, at least to some extent, by Gaston Boissier, in his *Fin du Paganisme*, Vol. II, p. 272. St. Ambrose, however, asserts it on two occasions: in *Ep.*, xvii, 9: "*Cum*

already had time to inform the Emperor, by means of a *libellus* which had been transmitted to him through the intermediary of Pope Damasus and Ambrose, that they accepted no responsibility for this deputation.

In the following year Gratian, who had gone to Gaul to suppress a mutiny among the soldiers, which the ambitious Maximus was turning to his own advantage, was assassinated at Lyons, August 25th, 383. Supported by the counsels of Theodosius, Valentinian II, despite his extreme youth—he was then about twelve years old—assumed power. The pagan party made up their minds to return to the charge. In that very year famine had ravaged Italy, Gaul, and Spain; was this not an evident mark of the anger of the gods? In addition, Symmachus had been appointed Prefect of Rome in 384, and Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, also a convinced pagan,³ became Pretorian

maiore iam curia Christianorum numero sit referta," and in *Ep.* xvii, 10: "*Pauci gentiles, . . . innumeri Christiani senatores.*" We cannot advance any testimony formally denying this. Cfr. Schultze's *Geschichte des Unterganges des griechisch-römischen Heidenthums*, I, 225 (Jena, 1887-1892).

³ In an inscription (*C. I. L.*, vi, 1778), he bears the following titles: "*Pontifici Vestae, pontifici Solis, quindecimviro, auguri, tauroboliato. . . . Hierofantae.*" Macrobius calls him

Prefect of Italy. It was a favourable opportunity. About the middle or the end of that year Symmachus drew up his famous petition which was presented to Valentinian II by a deputation of senators.

THE PETITION OF SYMMACHUS

After a brief allusion to the rebuff he had received as a delegate of the Senate when he had attempted to approach the late Emperor Gratian, Symmachus entered upon the subject matter of his petition in the following words: ⁴

"I come to you invested with a twofold quality: as prefect I represent the interests of the public; as a delegate I commend to your benevolence the mandate which my fellow-citizens have confided to me. . . . Our whole concern is only to watch over the *prestige* of Your Clemency.⁵ For what can be

"*Sacrorum omnium praesul*," and "*princeps religiosorum*." (*Saturnalia*, I, xi, 1, and xvii, 1).

⁴ I follow the text in Seeck's edition, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi*, vi. I, p. 280 sqq.

⁵ We see from the letters of Symmachus and Ambrose that the titles *Clementia tua*, *Numen vestrum*, *Perennitas vestra*, *Majestas vestra*, etc., were those usually employed in addressing the emperors. The customary epithets attached to their name were *Augustissimus*, *Beatissimus*, *Clementissimus*. We

more fitting to contribute to the glory of any age than to safeguard, as we are doing, the institutions of our ancestors, the rights and destinies of the fatherland?

“Call to mind the emperors of either sect, of either opinion. The first ⁶ observed the ceremonies of our forefathers; the second ⁷ by no means spurned them. If the religion of the one does not serve you as an example, let at least the tolerance of the other be imitated by you.

“What man is so much of a friend of the barbarians as not to regret the removal of the Altar of Victory? Let us at least render to its name that homage which is refused to its divinity.⁸ Your Eternity already owes much to it, and you will owe yet more. Let those scorn its power who have not received help from it, but do you not neglect a protection so favourable to your triumphs.

“ . . . At least we should have been spared the laying hands on what was an adornment to the Curia. Grant, I implore you, that we may transmit

also find in Ambrose's writings *Christianissimus, Tranquillissimus, Fidelissimus*. Cf. Engelbrecht, *Das Titelwesen bei den spätlateinischen Epistolographen*, pp. 9, 19–24 (Vienna, 1893).

⁶ Julian the Apostate.

⁷ Valentinian I. Ammianus Marcellinus (XXX, ix, 5) has highly praised the impartiality of Valentinian I. See Boissier's *Fin du Paganisme*, Vol. II, p. 254 sqq.

⁸ He places *numen* and *nomen* in juxtaposition in a play of words that is untranslatable.

the heritage we as children received from our parents, in our old age to our own children. Strong indeed is the attachment borne to an old custom. The measure taken by the divine Constantius⁹ was not long in force, and rightly so. You should avoid decisions which, as experience will teach you, cannot be long before being annulled. In our care rests the eternity of your glory and of your name, and we are unwilling that the future should find anything in your actions to correct.

“Where shall we henceforth take the oath to be faithful to your laws and word? What religious fear will strike terror into a lying soul, and prevent him from giving false witness? God is everywhere, without doubt, and there is no safe place for a perjurer: but as a means to inspire fear of guilt there is nothing stronger than the direct action of a divinity which is present on the spot. This Altar is the guarantee of harmony amongst us; to each one of us it is the pledge of our fidelity. And nothing gives more authority to our votes than for them to be recorded by all our order under the good faith of an oath.

“But it may be advanced that the divine Constantius has already done the same thing. Let us rather imitate the other acts of that Prince; he would never have done such a thing if any other

⁹ Constantius had first removed the Altar of Victory from the Curia, in May, 357, at the time of his visit to Rome.

before him had committed a similar error. For the downfall of one who has gone before is a warning to him who follows after, and the blame attaching to the example of the first helps men to act otherwise afterwards. . . . Will Your Eternity be pleased to call to mind other acts of that same Prince, so as to be more worthily inspired? Constantius took away none of their privileges from the consecrated virgins; he filled the priestly offices with nobles, and in no wise refused credits for the Roman ceremonies. Gladly he followed the Senate through the streets of the Eternal City, he gazed at the temples without taking offence, he read the names of the gods inscribed over their portals, he inquired as to the origin of these sanctuaries, and admired their architects.¹⁰ Although himself a follower of another, he safeguarded the old religion in the Empire.

“Every man in reality has his own customs, his own rites. The Divine Intelligence has assigned to different cities the guardians of their religion, and just as a soul is given to each child at birth, so likewise each people receives its genius to preside over its destiny.¹¹

“In addition consider what is for the public

¹⁰ Cf. Ammianus Marcellinus, XVI, 10, on the visit of Constantius to Rome in 356.

¹¹ This idea is found to have been previously held by the Emperor Julian (Neumann's ed., pp. 179 and 185). Perhaps he had taken it from Celsus (Koetchau's ed., Vol. II, p. 25).

good,—the best link between man and the gods. Since all reason is enveloped in mists, what means have we of coming to know the Divinity if not by questioning the memories and the recorded facts of the glorious past? If, therefore, a long sequence of years is the foundation of the authority of religion, let us preserve this faith of ages, let us follow our fathers, who themselves followed theirs to their advantage.

“Let us imagine Rome now addressing you in your presence: Excellent Princes, Fathers of the fatherland, respect my old age, to which by the aid of these sacred rites I have survived. Leave me my ancient ceremonies: I have no reason to repent of them. Allow me to live in accordance with my customs, since I am free. This religion has placed the universe under my laws: these are the sacrifices which drove back Hannibal from my walls, and the Gauls from the Capitol. Have I then been preserved only to meet with a disavowal in the days of my old age? . . .

“Let us realise that the object of universal adoration is in reality only one and the same Being. We all contemplate the same stars; the same sky is common to us all; we are surrounded by the same universe. What matters the manner in which each one seeks after truth? There cannot be only one road whereby to approach so great a mystery.

“But all that is idle discussion; it is our prayers,

and not conflicting ideas, we are now submitting to you. What profit has your sacred treasury drawn by taking away the privileges of the Vestals? . . . The immunity they beg is purely nominal, since their very poverty exempts them from all contribution. To take from them a portion of what they possess will only increase their *prestige*, if it be true that virginity consecrated to the welfare of the public gains in merit when all reward is refused to it. Do not suffer the integrity of your treasury to be soiled by profits of this sort. . . .

“But here we have the treasury taking possession of domains bequeathed to the virgins and ministers of religion by the wish of the dying. What! Is the religion of Rome placed outside the Roman law? What name can be given to a usurpation of property which no law or special clause has rendered null and void? Freedmen enjoy the legacies which have been bequeathed to them: we do not contest the lawful benefits conferred on them by will: and are noble virgins and the ministers of a sacred cult to be excluded from the enjoyment of property which comes to them by succession? What does it profit them to vow their chastity to the welfare of the public, to bestow the protection which comes from on high in order to render the Empire eternal, to reinforce your arms, your eagles, with their benignant power, to offer up effectual prayers for all—if they do not even enjoy the [benefits given by]

common law? Should then the service of man be more advantageous than the service of the gods? We are compassing the ruin of the State, which has never derived profit from being ungrateful.

“This privilege lasted in its integrity up to the day when degenerate bankers paid the sacred subsidies to vile street-porters. Thereupon a public famine came upon us. A bad harvest came to disappoint the hopes of all the provinces.¹² The fault must not be laid to the charge of the land; we do not blame the winds; it was not blight which harmed the crops, nor weeds which strangled the good grass: the sacrilege committed produced a barren year!

“Shall it be said that subsidies from the State are only refused to a religion which is foreign to it? But good princes should not accept the idea that what was in former days allowed to specified persons from the public exchequer should have the appearance of being given at the option of the treasury. Inasmuch as the State is made up of the sum-total of individuals, what proceeds from the State becomes again the property of individuals. You are the lords of everything, but you preserve to each one what is his own. . . . The property formerly given to maintain the honour of the city ceases to

¹² St. Ambrose (*Ep.* xviii, 21-23) confines this famine to Africa, Spain, and Italy (with the exception of Liguria and Venetia), and states that other provinces, such as Gaul, Rhetia, and Pannonia, had excellent harvests.

belong to those who gave it: at the beginning this was an advantage: by custom and with the lapse of time it becomes a debt. It is, therefore, an attempt to suggest to you very unfounded apprehensions to maintain that you have any share of responsibility to the donors so long as you do not incur the odium attaching to despoilers.”

The petition ends with an appeal for tolerance, which was held in respect by the father of Valentinian II before him, and which his brother Gratian only appeared to have forgotten because public feeling was prevented from reaching him.

Some modern critics have judged this petition of Symmachus to be cold and colourless.¹³ It is, however, certain that those who read it in all its freshness found it to be as noble as it was moving. The Christians themselves were far from being insensible to this invocation of ancestral glories, to this appeal to Roman patriotism with its style of sober elegance so well worthy of the man whom the Christian poet Prudentius some years later called “the most eloquent of those who spoke

¹³ For instance J. Geffcken (*Zwei Griechische Apologeten*, p. 317, Leipzig, and Berlin, 1907), considers that it discloses “*wie wenig Energie mehr unter den Heiden wohnte.*”

the Latin tongue.”¹⁴ When read in the Council of the Emperor, it produced a vivid impression. Christians and pagans seemed for one moment to be agreed to give a favourable reply to it.¹⁵ But Ambrose was on the watch. He considered that any retrograde step in the victorious march of Christianity might become a disaster, and with a view to baffle the intrigues of some and the weakness of others, he did not hesitate to address the following energetic letter to the young Valentinian:¹⁶

“Just as all who are subject to the authority of Rome fight for you, Emperors and Princes of this world, so *you* fight for the Almighty and the sacred interests of the faith. No one can feel his salvation sure if he does not in all sincerity adore the God of the Christians, whose power rules the universe. He alone is the true God, worthy to be venerated from the bottom of the heart. ‘For all the gods of the Gentiles are devils,’ as the Scripture says (Ps. XCV, 5). . . . Therefore, most Christian Emperor, since it appertaineth to you to testify your faith to the true God, and offer it to Him as a pledge of your piety, I am astounded that certain men

¹⁴ *Contra Symmachum*, ii, 19.

¹⁵ Cf. Ambrose, *De Obitu Valentiniani*, 19 (*P. L.*, xvi. 425).

¹⁶ *Ep.* xvii (*P. L.*, xvi, 1001).

have found cause to hope to see you give the order to restore the altars of the pagan gods, and to open credits for the upkeep of profane sacrifices. For [thereby] you will have the appearance of making a gift from your own personal funds of these benefits, which till lately were a charge on the revenues or imperial treasury, rather than securing their restitution in accordance with the law.

“Do men who were so little chary of our blood, and who have made our churches into heaps of ruins, come complaining of their losses? . . . They claim from you privileges, when only yesterday the laws of Julian refused *us* the vested right of every one to preach and teach,¹⁷—privileges which have often become an occasion of apostasy even for Christians, privileges which have served to win over a certain number of them, whether from improvidence or from a desire to escape the burden of public duties. And inasmuch as steadfastness is rare, there have been numerous scandals to deplore, even under Christian princes.

“If these privileges had not been already abolished, I should approve of your using your authority to put an end to them. But since several of your predecessors have formally suppressed them throughout the world, and even in Rome the brother of Your Clemency, Gratian of august memory, logical

¹⁷ On Julian's legislation as regards teaching, cfr. Allard's *Julien l'Apostat*, Vol. II, pp. 330 sqq., 2nd ed., 1903.

in his enlightened faith, annulled them by a rescript, do not, I pray you, repeal such a religious measure, nor tear up the edicts of your brother. No one thinks that you should heedlessly interfere with decisions he thought right to take in civil matters: and will you lightly treat his edicts when they concern religious matters? . . .

“Let no one take advantage of your youth to insinuate himself into your mind. If it be a pagan who solicits you, he ought not to enchain you in the bonds of his superstition, but rather should his zeal afford you a lesson and example of the eagerness with which you should serve the true faith. Do they not bolster up the false thing with all the ardour worthy of truth? Due regard must be had [they say] to the services of men of high distinction: I agree. But God should be preferred to everyone. If it were a military question, it would be necessary to pay heed to the advice of a man thoroughly versed in matters pertaining to war, and to hold to his opinion. When it is religion which is at stake, think only of God. No one can feel offended if any one esteems Almighty God to be superior to himself. God too has His own views. You do not compel any one to adore what he rejects. Do you, O Emperor, exercise the same liberty and let others take heed not to impose upon the Emperor what they would take in bad part if he wished to impose on his subjects. The pagans themselves detest a man who be-

trays his conscience, for every one should be free to defend and faithfully preserve his principles.

“If some men, Christian in name, are of the opinion that you ought to promulgate this decree, do not allow yourself to be imposed upon by words, by assumptions without value: whoever gives this advice, and whoever agrees to it, is offering sacrifice. But more tolerable is the sacrifice of one than the downfall of all. Moreover in the present case all the Christian senators are placed in peril. If—which God forbid—a pagan emperor were this day to raise an altar to idols and compel the Christians to take part in sacrifices, to savour and breathe the embers of a sacrilegious altar, and the smoke of kindled wood, if he gave utterance to his opinions in a curia of such a kind, in which he would be compelled, before speaking, to take his oath on the altar of the idol (for in very truth this is how the presence of the altar is interpreted—they wish all the senators present to deliberate in public under this alleged sacred presiding guardian, while Christians already form the majority of the Senate) the Christian, obliged to come to the Senate under these conditions, would think that he was being subjected to persecution. Now this compulsion is quite the usual thing, and they are sometimes forced to go [to the Senate] under penalties. What! You are the Emperor, and shall Christians be compelled to take their oath on an altar? What does taking an oath mean if not to

acknowledge the divine power of Him whom a man holds to be the judge of his good faith? You are the Emperor, and do men dare to present requests like these to you? They are asking you to raise up an altar, and to open credits for profane sacrifices? . . .

“Such a decision cannot be made without sacrilege. I implore you, therefore, not to make it, to put far from you any resolve of the kind, or any acquiescence in such a decree. As a priest of Jesus Christ, I make appeal to your faith. All the bishops would have joined with me if they could have believed the news suddenly spread abroad that a measure of this kind had been suggested in your council, or had formed the subject of a petition from the Senate.

“But let not people talk of a ‘petition from the Senate.’ A handful of pagans usurp a name which does not belong to them. About two years ago they made a similar attempt: on that occasion Damasus, the holy Bishop of the Roman Church, elected by God’s judgment, transmitted to me a memorandum signed by a considerable number of Christian Senators. In it they declared that they had formulated no request of this kind, that they were not a party to the petitions of the pagans and that they refused their adherence to them, and they wound up their dissatisfaction by asserting that they would go no more to the Senate in any capacity whatever

if such a decree were passed. Is it worthy of the age you live in—a Christian age—to despoil Christian Senators of their dignity, and to grant the impious wishes of the pagans?

“I brought this memorandum to the notice of Your Clemency’s brother, and thus it was well established that the Senate had not charged its members with any petition relating to the expenses of a superstitious religion.

“Perhaps people will say to me, ‘Why were not the Christian senators present at the sitting when the petition was drawn up?’ Their very absence was a sufficient indication of their views. In speaking before the Emperor they said all that was necessary. Ought we to show any surprise that in Rome liberty of resistance is denied to mere citizens, when you are refused the right to reject measures of which you disapprove, and to maintain your own views?

“Therefore, bearing in mind the mission with which I was recently charged, I make a second appeal to your faith, to your conscience. Be heedful not to give a favourable reply to a pagan petition like this, and to sanction with your name a decision of this kind. In any case, place yourself in touch with the Emperor Theodosius, the father of Your Piety, whom you have been in the habit of consulting in almost every important matter. Now there is nothing more important than religion, nothing of higher concern than the faith. If it were a

civil dispute that was in question the opposite side would preserve its right to reply. Now the present case is one of religion, and I intervene, therefore, in my capacity as bishop. Let me be provided with a copy of the petition which has been sent, so that I may be able to answer it the more completely, and I would ask that the father of Your Clemency, who is well enlightened on all its points, would be good enough to give his reply. If a contrary decision be taken, we bishops shall be unable lightly to assent to it, nor to disguise our opinion. You will of course be able to attend in the church, but you will not find any priest there, or he will only be there to offer a protest. What answer will you make to him when he says, 'The Church has no longer any use for your gifts, since you lavish them upon pagan temples. The altar of Christ rejects your offerings, since you are raising an altar to idols. Your speech belongs to you; your hands, your signature are yours, your acts are your own. Jesus, our Lord, scorns and rejects your homage, since you are offering it to idols. Has He not said to you, No man can serve two masters (Matth. VI, 24)? Virgins consecrated to God do not derive any privileges from you, and are the virgins of Vesta to lay claim to them? What need have you of the priests of Christ when you prefer to them the impious petitions of the pagans? We can have no part in the errors of others.'

“What will be your answer to these words? Will you say that you are only a child who has made a mistake? But each period of life is ripe for Christ, each period has its full development for God. It cannot be admitted that faith has any childhood. We have seen poor little mites intrepidly confess Christ in the face of persecutors.

“What reply will you make to your brother? Will you not hear him say to you, ‘I never felt that I had suffered defeat when I left the Empire to you. I never lamented my death, since I had you as my successor. Without grief I saw power slipping from my hands in the full belief that my ordinances, especially those touching divine religion, would last for ever. Therein lay the monuments of my piety, the booty wrested from the world, the trophies won back from the devil, the spoils of the enemy of the human race—pledges of an eternal victory. Could a personal enemy have stripped me more? You have abrogated my laws: he who dared to take up arms against me never did that! The wound I receive is all the more cruel because it is my brother who condemns my decrees. The best part of me, thanks to you, is in peril. Up till this moment only my body had perished: now it is my power which is about to be annulled. My supreme power is henceforth taken from me, and, what is worse, it is taken from me by *your* friends, it is taken from me by *my* friends, and men rob me of what even my enemies admired

in me. If it be with full consent that you have given your adhesion, you have condemned my faith; if you have yielded through constraint, you have betrayed your own. Therefore,—a still more grievous thing,—it is in your own person too that I am being endangered.’

“And what answer will you make to your father when, with his heart still more wrung, he will say to you, ‘My son, you have judged ill of me if you thought me in connivance with the pagans. No one ever told me that there was an altar in the Roman Curia. I never knew anything of such a sacrilege—that, in an assembly composed of Christians and pagans, the pagans in other words offered sacrifices and insulted the faith of the Christians who were present, and that the latter were obliged to take part in them in spite of themselves. Many diverse crimes have been committed in my reign. I have punished all who were discovered. If such and such a one has escaped, has anyone the right to say that he has had my approval, when no one had spoken to me of him? You have judged very ill of me if you believed that it was some foreign superstition and not my faith, which has preserved the Empire for me!’

“You must see, O Emperor, that to come to such a decision is first of all to offend God, then your father, and then your brother. I implore you to do

what you know well should serve the interests of your salvation before God."

At the beginning of his refutation of the petition of Symmachus, as we shall read further on, Ambrose seems to say that this Letter XVII was written when Valentinian had already decided to reject the petition of the Senate. Would he, however, have adopted such a respectful tone of condemnation if the young Emperor had at that time formally given expression to his will to run counter to his counsellors?

There is always the fact that, according to the formal testimony of Ambrose,¹⁸ Valentinian "inspired, like another Daniel, by the Spirit of God," declared that he intended to make no change in the decision arrived at two years before by Gratian.

St. Ambrose and the Christian side triumphed. But this victory was to be completed by a detailed counter reply to the petition of Symmachus, in order that it might be shown that this result proceeded not alone from the imperial will or caprice, but from the dictates of right and reason.

¹⁸ *De Obitu Valentiniani*, xix and xx (*P. L.*, xvi. 1425).

Such is the object of Letter XVIII.¹⁹

“Being informed that the illustrious Symmachus, Prefect of the City, had made a petition to Your Clemency to obtain the restitution of the altar which had been removed from the Roman Curia, and that you yourself, O Emperor, in spite of the inexperience of youth still in its first flower, had disapproved of the request of the pagans with a vigour of faith worthy of a veteran, I hasten to present you with a document wherein I have summarized the principal ideas which it seems to me necessary to suggest to you. None the less do I beg for a copy of the petition of Symmachus. Wherefore, although I have no anxiety on account of your faith, but being desirous to have a further guarantee, and well assured, in addition, of a considerate examination, I wish to give an answer to the statements contained in this petition.”

St. Ambrose begins by cautioning the Emperor against the persuasive eloquence of Symmachus. He invites him to dismiss the mirage of phrases in order to discern the speciousness underlying them. Then he goes on to make a direct attack on the arguments advanced by his adversary:

¹⁹ *P. L.*, xvi, 1013.

“The illustrious Prefect of the City has made three statements which he considers to be sound: Rome demands what he calls her ‘ancient gods’; provision must be made for the priests and vestals, and after the suppression of the allocation to the priests a general famine had taken place. In the foreground he places a suppliant Rome begging with tears that the rites appertaining to her ancient ceremonies be restored. Behold, he says, those sacred rites which drove Hannibal from the ramparts of Rome and the Gauls from the Capitol. He thinks to proclaim their efficacy, while he shows up their powerlessness. Thus Hannibal was able for long to insult the religion of Rome, and to come off victorious in spite of the gods who were fighting against him, even under the very walls of the City. Why suffer themselves to be besieged when armed gods were on their side fighting for them? ²⁰

“And what are we to say of the Gauls, who, creeping into the very heart of the Capitol, were just about to overwhelm what remained of the Romans, if a goose had not betrayed them with its startled cackling? Are such as these the guardians of the temples of Rome? Where then was Jupiter at that time? Are we to believe he spoke in the person of a goose?

²⁰ The argument is borrowed from Tertullian, *Apol.*, xl. It was again used by St. Augustine, *De Civit. Dei*, iii, 17.

“But where is the point of my denying that their sacred rites fought for the Romans? Hannibal too worshipped the same gods. Let *them* choose between them! If their religion brought victory to the side of the Romans, it was afterwards brought to naught by the Carthaginians; if it triumphed for the Carthaginians, it must have therefore been of no service to the side of the Romans! . . .

“Quite other is the real language used by Rome. ‘Why do you drench me with blood day by day,’ she cries, ‘by uselessly shedding everywhere the innocent blood of animals? The secret of victory does not lie in the tendons of victims, but in the strenuousness of her warriors. In order to conquer the world I have followed another method. It was by force of arms that Camillus won back the standards torn from the Capitol after cutting in pieces the conquerors of the Tarpeian Rock. It was not his religion which found the means to repulse them, it was his valour defeated them. . . . It was not because he was surrounded by the altars on the Capitol, but because he was fighting in the midst of the troops of Hannibal that Scipio Africanus found his triumph. But why bring forward only the examples shown by our ancestors? I loathe the rites practised by Nero. . . . Moreover, I repent me of my downfall, and do not blush, despite my old age, to be converted together with the whole world. It is never too late to mend. . . . May God Himself,

who created the heavens, instruct me in His mysteries: man cannot, for he does not know himself.'

"One cannot, you may say, attain to so great a mystery by one road alone. That of which you are ignorant *we* have learnt from the mouth of God. What you are seeking after, groping, we already hold through divine wisdom and truth. Our two methods, therefore, are in full disagreement. *You* go to the emperors to grant peace to your gods; *we* go to Christ to ask peace for our emperors themselves.

"'But,' you go on to say, 'the statues should have their ancient altars restored to them and the temples, their ornaments. Present these demands to those who share your superstition: a Christian emperor can only honour the altar of Christ. What! They would constrain the pious hands and lips of believers to second their sacrilege? Let the voice of our Emperor make the name of Christ resound and proclaim the one God he holds in his heart. Did ever a pagan emperor raise an altar to Christ? 'But admire the magnanimity of these people! *We* have increased in the midst of injustices, misery, and tortures. *They* deem that their ceremonies cannot support themselves without the aid of the treasury! Their immunities must be restored to the Vestals,' cries Symmachus. 'Here we have in very truth the language of people who are incapable of thinking that there can be such a thing as virginity with-

out reward. Mistrustful of virtue they rely on the inducement of gain. And with these promised rewards how many virgins can they number? It is with difficulty that seven young girls, seven Vestals, can be persuaded to be enrolled! Such is the number of those whom their fillets, their purple robes, their garish display and imposing establishment, their immense privileges, their large financial subsidies, and a term set to their continency, have been able to enrol! But let them lift up the eyes of their souls and bodies, let them behold the number of *our* modest virgins. . . . They will see no fillets gleaming on their heads, but a miserable veil, which offers no distinction except that given by chastity. . . . No purple insignia, no fascinating luxury. *Their* lives are spent in fasting. *They* have no privileges, no subsidies. In a word, everything in their state would seem of a kind to disgust them with the duties they practise. But it is in their exercise that they learn to love them. . . . Supposing we admit that some rewards should be given to virgins. With what a flood of gold, then, would the Christian virgins be gorged! What treasure would be sufficient for them? Do they profess to confer these advantages on the Vestals only? Have they then no shame, after having arrogated to themselves all the benefits which they enjoyed under the pagan emperors, in refusing to us the right to share their lot under Christian emperors?

“They complain, further, that subsidies are no longer granted to their priests and ministers. What recriminations have they not growled out on that head! Recent legislation, on the other hand, debars us from the enjoyment of even private bequests, and yet no one complains.²¹ We do not see any injustice in that because the loss of this does not distress us. . . . We can imagine the laments of the pagans if a law such as that were to be brought against them—a law which would mean that the priest, at the price of all his personal advantages, purchases the right to place himself at the service of all. . . . Compare our two situations. There is nothing to prevent anyone making a will in favour of the ministers of the temples; only an impious man, a man of the basest character, or a lewd fellow, is debarred from this right: the cleric alone is excluded. . . . A legacy bequeathed by a Christian widow to the pagan priests of a sanctuary has full effect; if it falls to the ministers of God, it is null and void. I mention all this, not by way of complaint, but that they may understand what it is I am *not* complain-

²¹ An Imperial Constitution of the year 370 had forbidden clerics or ascetics to inherit from any woman, or to receive (from any woman) any gift while they were both alive. “*Nec de lege conqueror, sed doleo cur meruimus hanc legem*,” St. Jerome says in *Ep.*, LII, 6 (*P. L.*, xxii, 532). In 390 Theodosius forbade deaconesses (who must no longer be recruited except from childless widows over 60 years of age) to leave their real property to clerics or to the Church (*Cod. Theod.*, xvii, 11, 27).

ing of. I would rather that we lacked money than virtue.

“Neither gifts nor legacies made to the Church are touched, they say. Will they tell us who has taken away from the temples the gifts made to them? To-day they are trumpeting forth the name of justice, they call out for equity: where were all these fine sentiments when they despoiled the Christians of all they possessed, when they robbed them of everything even to the last breath of their lives, when they forbade them to render the last burial offices which have never before been refused to any-one? . . . It is a triumph of the faith that they are now constrained to blame the conduct of their ancestors whose actions they are now condemning. What! How can they claim the privileges enjoyed by those whose actions they condemn?

“Moreover no one is opposed to the sanctuaries keeping the gifts made to them, and to the *haruspices* retaining their legacies. Only their landed properties have been taken from them, because they were not employing for a religious purpose what they claimed in the name of religion. Since they bring forward our example, why do they not agree to bear the same charges as we do? The Church possesses nothing except the faith; this takes the place of revenues and subsidies. The maintenance of the poor forms her patrimony. Let our adversaries tell us how many captives the temples have ran-

somed, how many poor they have fed, for how many exiles they have provided the means of subsistence. Their funded property has been taken away, but not their rights."

In an ironical vein St. Ambrose then enters upon the third grievance adduced by Symmachus—the famine which had just ravaged the Roman world and had been brought forward as a supreme warning sent by the gods, the victims of so many profanations.

"What kind of justice is this, on the part of your gods, to refuse the means of subsistence to the whole world, because it has been taken away from a few priests? Must their vengeance then be more severe than the fault? . . .

"What *is* certain, is that a number of years have passed since the privileges attaching to the temples were suppressed throughout the whole world: how is it then that only yesterday the idea came to the gods to avenge their injuries? . . . But let us grant that last year the pagans might have had reason to believe that the indignities suffered by their gods were avenged? Why have these gods taken no account of *this* year? The country populations are no longer pulling up roots whereby to feed themselves, nor are they reduced to satisfy their hunger

with wild berries, nor to seek their nourishment from bushes. But, rejoicing over the success of their labours, they are marvelling at the fertility of the crops, and are making up for the privations they underwent by the abundance they are now enjoying to their heart's content. The earth has rendered to us her fruits with usury. And moreover even last year, we know that the greater portion of the provinces had plentiful crops. . . ."

Symmachus had invoked the respect due to ancestors, to the *ritus maiorum*. To this superstitious religion of the past St. Ambrose opposes in a brilliant picture the necessary evolution of everything which lives, and the progressive march of humanity towards a truth becoming more and more luminous and complete.

"The universe, like everything else, has had imperfect beginnings, in order that the Christian faith, with her white hair, should finally crown its venerable old age. Let those who are shocked at this, blame the seasons because their fruitfulness is late in coming, or the harvest of grapes because it only takes place at the end of the year, or the olive because its fruit is the last to ripen."

Moreover, was Rome herself so attached to her customs that they have not often been changed in the course of time? Why, therefore, so many scruples?

Besides, should not those who so peremptorily demanded the restitution of the Altar of Victory in the name of liberty of conscience deem that that of the Christian senators was, after all, as worthy of respect as that of the pagan senators, and that they too (the Christian senators) had the right to be offended at having images thrust upon them which were repugnant to their faith?

“That the Christian must be present while the pagan is offering his sacrifice—is such a thing tolerable? ‘Let the Christians,’ as Symmachus says, ‘in spite of their protests, receive in their eyes the smoke from the victims, let them hear with their ears their chanting, let their throats be full of the ashes from the altar, their nostrils with the perfume of the incense, and notwithstanding their repugnance, let the sparks glittering on the burning hearth leap up to them.’ Cannot they (the pagans) then be content with their baths, their porticos, their public squares thronged with statues? Should the condition of some be different from that of others in an as-

sembly where all is in common? Is the Christian element in the Senate to be bound by the word of those who take the oath, by the engagements of those who swear before this altar? If it offer another opinion, it will bear the appearance of bringing into relief this false thing; if it acquiesce in what is said, it will seem to be associating itself with the sacrilege. . . . And let no one feel reassured by saying to himself that he will not go to the Senate: he who participates in spirit is present in a greater degree than he who is only an ocular witness. . . .”

After a last word to reassure the Emperor in the face of the insinuations of those who drew attention to the fact that Gratian, however piously Catholic he might have been, had met with a lamentable death, Ambrose concludes in these words:—

“I have replied to those who have attacked me as though they had not offered provocation, for I wished to refute the petition of Symmachus, and not to emphasize the pagan superstition. But this very petition will give you some useful points. After passing in review your predecessors, Symmachus observes that those farthest back practised the religion of their fathers, and that the latest in date by no means rejected it, and adds: ‘If you are un-

willing to follow the example which the piety of the former offers to you, show at least the toleration of the latter.' He thus shows you unmistakably that you owe as much to your faith as to your affection for your brother. If, in the interests of their party, they propose to you as an example the toleration of princes who, although they were Christians, did not abolish the pagan decrees, how much more should you give heed to your fraternal affection by maintaining those dispositions which are in perfect accord with your faith and the duties owing to your blood?"

We note the fire breathing through this answer, and with what sparkling *verve*, yet without any acrimony, Ambrose refutes his adversary.²² The thesis advanced by him is very curious when it is examined in the light of the strange reversal which history has introduced into the parts played by the two actors engaged, or at least of the parties which they represented. Gaston Boissier²³ says: "I suppose

²² Ambrose did full justice to the attitude of Symmachus. Later on he wrote in *Ep.*, lvii, 2: "*Rettulerat vir amplissimus Symmachus, cum esset praefectus Urbis, ad Valentinianum augustae memoriae imperatorem iuniorem, ut templis quae sublata fuerant reddi iuberet. Functus est ille partibus suis pro studio et cultu suo; utique etiam ego episcopus partes debui recognoscere.*"

²³ *La Fin du Paganisme*, II, 291.

that in our day the party, which makes open profession of being most opposed to the Church, would be highly astonished if it could bring itself to read with attention the discourse of the Bishop of Milan. It would find therein one of the most lively satisfactions it could experience, that of discovering arguments in favour of its own views in one who is regarded as an adversary. For example, there are passages which might be utilised by those desirous of giving an answer to men vexed at the confiscation of the property of the clergy. To draw the line at recent polemics, which are now exciting the passions of our minds, it seems to me that all the partisans of the separation of Church and State and the suppression of the budget for religious purposes, might be able, with some pleasure to themselves, to place St. Ambrose on their side. I think, too, that those who show themselves so fiercely determined not to permit any religious emblems outside the churches, under the pretext that they are an offence to those who hold other beliefs, or even to those who have none, would be within their rights to recall that this is precisely the reason advanced by the Christian senators for petitioning their ruler to cause the disappear-

ance of the Altar of Victory. . . . We might thus say, if it be permitted to apply the terms of to-day to things of the past, that in this matter Ambrose was the radical and Symmachus the reactionary!"²⁴

The question of the Altar of Victory was again raised on future occasions. In the year 390 a party in the Senate sent a deputation to the Emperor Theodosius, who was then at Milan. He seemed to be hesitating for a moment, in spite of the intervention of Ambrose. But the latter had only to remain aloof for a short time without appearing at Court, and the Emperor yielded. The deputation was dismissed without obtaining anything.²⁵ A fresh attempt was made in 392 with Valentinian II, who was then in Gaul. That, too, ended in a rebuff, without Ambrose even having to write to the Emperor.²⁶ The favourable disposition of Eugenius towards paganism encouraged the pagan senators to demand once more the restitution of the altar and the credits formerly set apart for the expenses of worship. Two

²⁴ We find the same impression in Msgr. Duchesne's *Hist. Anc. de l'Eglise*, II, 635.

²⁵ Ambrose, *Ep.*, lvii, 4.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

deputations successively presented this request in 392. Greatly embarrassed, Eugenius adopted a rather ingenious middle course. He made a gift to the promoters of the petition of the property he was anxious to avoid restoring to idolatry, in order not to alienate the Catholic clergy. None the less Ambrose protested²⁷ against this concession, which he viewed purely and simply as a sacrilege.²⁸

The epilogue to this long struggle is to be found in the poem which Prudentius wrote against Symmachus²⁹ between the spring of 402 and the summer of 403, which is not very remarkable from the literary point of view. Prudentius borrows the greater part of his arguments from Ambrose, but marshals them with much skill and considerable patriotic fervour.³⁰

²⁷ *Ep.*, lvii.

²⁸ *Ep.*, lxi, 2.

²⁹ Boissier (*Fin du Paganisme*, Vol. II, p. 144) thinks that Prudentius wished merely to complete an already certain victory by capturing the admiration of the pagans by a work of irreproachable composition. Puech (*Prudence*, p. 195, Paris, 1888) seems tempted to believe that he made a pretence of a last effort made by the pagan party upon Honorius and Arcadius, the sons of Theodosius. He supports his contention at the beginning of the second book.

³⁰ The principal similarities between Ambrose and Prudentius are pointed out in the following works and articles:

The duel was closed. The poem of Prudentius is sufficient to prove, however, that his contemporaries still felt the importance of the question. The historians of that time make no mention of it, and what we know is derived from the letters of St. Ambrose and the report of Symmachus. Seen from a distance, these struggles waged by such eloquent and valiant champions, take on a symbolic significance, and the modern imagination has a right to see in them an epitome of the death agony of the old Roman spirit under the pressure of a triumphant Christianity.

THE STRUGGLES AGAINST THE ARIANS

The influence and *prestige* which St. Ambrose had secured could not fail to excite against him many jealous animosities in court circles. Justina, the mother of the Emperor Valentinian II, had little love for him. Of set purpose she surrounded herself with Arian

Hist. de la Litter. du Moyen Age en Occident, p. 300, translated from Ebert by Aymeric and Condamin, 1883; Chavanne, *Le Patriotisme de Prudence* in the *Revue d'Hist. et de Litt. Relig.*, 1899, pp. 339, 341, 344, 399, 402 sqq.; Geffcken, *Zwei Griechische Apologeten*, pp. 318 sqq., Leipzig and Berlin, 1907.

Goths who were becoming more and more numerous in the army. In addition, the Arians whom she had brought with her from Sirmium could not forget the setback inflicted on them by St. Ambrose a few years previously at that place, when, repairing thither in person, he had been successful in securing the election of Bishop Anemius, an adherent of the faith of Nicea. As regards the pagans, their sympathies went out naturally to Arianism rather than to the strict orthodoxy of Nicea. They knew, moreover, what a redoubtable adversary they had in St. Ambrose.

All these animosities, increased moreover by a desire to win over the Germanic Arian nations, who were working secretly for the usurper Maximus, came to a head in an unexpected demand which caused poignant difficulties for St. Ambrose. During one of the first months of the year 385 he was summoned to the palace.³¹ The Emperor Valentinian II, duly instructed by his mother and her courtiers, received him surrounded by all the imposing pomp of the Imperial Court, and requested him to hand over the Portian Basilica. Without allowing himself to be intimidated, St. Ambrose replied

³¹ Cf. *Sermo contra Auxentium*, § 29 (*P. L.*, xvi, 1058).

with a deferential, but categorical refusal. The interview was interrupted by the shouts of the crowd without, who, believing that an attempt on the liberty or life of St. Ambrose was being concerted, threatened to break down the doors of the palace. The military force sent against them quickly recognised that they were powerless to disperse the crowd. The court took alarm, and, at the urgent entreaties of those around him, St. Ambrose went out and harangued the people, and begged them to compose themselves, promising that no basilica should be wrested from the Catholics.

The assurance transmitted to them was a feint. A few weeks later, at Easter-tide, St. Ambrose received a fresh summons. This time the struggle could not be avoided. He has narrated its episodes himself, in a very spirited manner, in a letter addressed to his sister: ³²

“Nearly all your letters testify to your uneasy solicitude on behalf of the Church. Learn then what has taken place. The day after I received your letter, in which you disclosed to me the visions which were agitating you, grave cares came to overwhelm me with their weight. It was no longer the Portian

³² *Ep.*, xx (*P. L.*, xvi, 1036).

Basilica, the one situated outside the walls. which they were demanding from me, but the new basilica, the one inside the walls, and the larger of the two. In the first place, the military authorities, and the *Comites* of the Imperial Council,³³ came to me to force me to promise to hand over this basilica, putting it as though in order to anticipate a rising of the populace. I answered, in conformity with the duties of my charge, that a priest could not hand over the temple of God. On the following day³⁴ this reply was acclaimed in the church. The Prefect himself came there and endeavoured to make us agree to give up the Portian Basilica at least. The congregation cried out against this. The Prefect went off declaring that he must refer the matter to the Emperor. On the morrow, Sunday,³⁵ after the lessons and sermon, and the dismissal of the catechumens, I was explaining in the baptistery of the church the *symbolum* to a few *competentes*,³⁶ when people came

³³ The *Comites Augusti* were originally friends of the Emperor, who accompanied him on his journeys and with whom, on special occasions, he took counsel. The title obtained an official significance under Constantine and after that was given to his officials in the various branches of the imperial administration. It carried with it many privileges and exemptions.

³⁴ Saturday, the eve of Palm Sunday.

³⁵ Palm Sunday.

³⁶ *Competentes* were candidates for baptism (in Greek *φωτιζόμενοι*). Cf. Funk, *Kirchengesch. Abhandl. u. Unters.*, i, p. 224 and 228.

and announced to me that *decani*³⁷ had been sent from the palace to the Portian Basilica, that they had hung *velæ*³⁸ on it, and that a portion of the people had acquiesced in this. I did not, however, break off my ministration, and began to celebrate Mass.³⁹ While I was offering the Holy Sacrifice, I learnt that the people had just carried off a certain Castulus, whom the Arians recognised as a priest. They had met him when passing through a square. I wept bitter tears, and in my oblation prayed to God that no blood might be shed in a matter concerning the Church, and that He would rather shed mine, not alone for the salvation of the people, but also for those impious men. In a word, I sent priests and deacons, and rescued this man from the fate which was threatening him. Forthwith the most severe sentences were inflicted, beginning with the whole body of shopkeepers. During the

³⁷ The *decani* formed part of the Palatine militia and filled an office very similar to that of the lictors under the Republic.

³⁸ These *velæ* indicated that the building was to be considered the property of the Emperor.

³⁹ *Missam facere coepi*. This is the first example of the word *missa* to designate the liturgical sacrifice. Cf. *Revue d'Hist. et de Littér. Relig.*, p. 287 (1897). Kellner, however, is of opinion that in this passage the word merely signifies the dismissing of the *competentes*. Hence a controversy, the chief episodes of which will be found in Funk, *Kirchengesch. Abhandl. u. Untersuch.*, iii, 134-143; Hugo Koch, *Der Katholik*, xxxvi, p. 239-240 (1907); *ibid.*, xxxvii, pp. 114-127 (1908); Kellner, *ibid.*, pp. 431-2; O. Rottmanner, *Geistesfrüchte aus der Klosterzelle*, pp. 135-156 (Munich, 1908).

holydays of the last week [before Easter] when as a rule [the authorities] release prisoners committed for debt, nothing was heard but the noise of chains and innocent people loaded with irons. Two hundred pounds' weight in gold was levied, to be paid within three days. They made answer that they would give that, or even double, if necessary, provided that they might preserve their faith. The prisons were overflowing with merchants. All the palace officials, secretaries, employees, subordinates, and ushers of the different *Comites* received orders to refrain from appearing in public under the pretext of preventing them from taking part in sedition. The *honorati* ⁴⁰ were threatened with the gravest measures if they did not give up the basilica. Persecution raged. If any opened their doors, the most serious riots might be feared. *Comites* and Tribunes came to me demanding the prompt handing over of the basilica. They told me that the Emperor was only using his rights, since everything was under his authority. I replied: 'If the Emperor were asking for anything that belonged to me—lands, money, anything that I possess—I should not refuse him a thing, although all my possessions belong to the poor. But things divine are not the property of the Emperor. If you must have my patrimony, take it. If it is my person, here it is. Is it your wish to cast me in irons, to lead me to exe-

⁴⁰ Men exercising any official function.

cution? I accept everything with joy. I will not hide behind the multitude, I will not embrace the altars pleading for my life: I would rather be immolated for the altars.' Deep down in my heart I was in fear, knowing that armed soldiers had been sent to take possession of the basilica. If only, in their endeavour to seize it, no massacre might take place, which might cause the destruction of the entire city! I besought God not to allow me to survive the ruin of such a great city, possibly of all Italy. I inveighed against this craving to shed blood and offered my own head. There were among them some Gothic tribunes. I approached them and said: 'Has Rome taken you into her service to become the promoters of public disturbances? Whither will you go if this country is brought to naught?' They urged me to appease the populace. I replied that it was within my power not to excite them to revolt, but that it rested with God to calm them; moreover, if they considered me an agent of sedition, they should at once turn their wrath upon me, or banish me into the desert, no matter where. At these words they withdrew. I passed the whole day⁴¹ in the old basilica.⁴² Then I went home to lie down, in order that they might find me prepared if they came to take me away. As soon as I had set foot outside, before daybreak, the basilica was surrounded

⁴¹ Wednesday in Holy Week.

⁴² The Portian Basilica.

by soldiers on all sides. The latter, people said, had caused the Emperor to be informed that if he wished to come out, there was nothing to prevent him doing so; that they would be at his disposal if they saw him joining the side of the Catholics; otherwise, they would assemble at the meeting convoked by Ambrose. No Arian dared show himself. There were none among the citizens; a small number only belonged to the Emperor's household; a few were Goths. Just as in former days a chariot served them for a dwelling, now their chariot was the Church. Wherever that woman ⁴³ goes, she takes with her all her company. From the lamentations of the people I knew that the basilica was surrounded. During the reading I was informed that the new basilica, too, was full of people, that the crowd there appeared to be greater than when every one was free to go there, and that they were clamouring for a reader. Nay more, the soldiers themselves, who appeared to have taken possession of the basilica, on learning that I had given orders to expel them from membership in our community, began to come over to our side. On seeing them, the women took fright, and one of them rushed out. But the soldiers cried out that they had come to pray, and not to fight. The people raised a few shouts. What moderation, what constancy, what faith was required for us to set out for this basilica, where those who had con-

⁴³ The Empress Justina.

vened (I knew it) were likewise demanding my presence!"

St. Ambrose then relates that he began to preach with a view to tranquillizing their agitated minds. Alluding to the Book of Job, a passage from which the congregation had just been listening to, he declared that, "having mounted the pulpit to extol one single Job, he had found in his hearers many other Jobs worthy of admiration." And he went on to enumerate the trials of a new kind which God had judged fit to inflict on himself as well as his brethren. Without hesitating to make the most transparent allusions to the Empress, he demonstrated the persecution of the whole Church in his own person. He also took pains to dissipate the sophistries whereby people tried to justify this abuse of legal power. "They urge that everything is lawful to the Emperor, since everything belongs to him. To this I reply, 'Do not think, O Emperor, that you have any imperial right over things divine. Do not advance such pretensions, and if you desire a long reign, submit yourself to God. It is written, To God what is God's, to Cæsar what is Cæsar's. To the Emperor the palaces,

to the priest the churches. The right which is allotted to you extends over the public edifices, not over the sacred ones.' They tell me the Emperor has declared, 'I too ought to have a basilica.' This is my answer: 'It is not lawful for you to have one. What have you in common with an adulteress? For she is an adulteress who is not united to Christ in lawful marriage.' I was still preaching when they came to tell me that the royal *velae* had been folded up,⁴⁴ and that the people filling the basilica were calling out for my presence. At once I changed the tenour of my discourse to suit this new situation."

Commenting on Ps. LXVIII: "O God, the nations have entered into thine inheritance," he celebrated the unlooked-for new recruits whom the Catholics had just secured among the soldiers who had been sent against them.

"Such was my discourse, and I was feeling astounded that the mind of the Emperor could have been softened by the zeal of the soldiers, the earnest entreaties of the *Comites*, and the supplications of

⁴⁴ The sign that the Emperor renounced his claim for the possession of that basilica. The basilica built within the city is here meant, not the Portian Basilica, in which St. Ambrose was preaching at that moment.

the people, when a secretary was announced, the bearer of orders for me. I withdrew for a moment, and he communicated his commission. 'What is your idea,' he said, 'in resisting the wishes of the Emperor?' 'What wishes? I do not know what they are,' I replied; 'neither do I know in what I have shown temerity.' 'Why have you sent priests to the basilica?' he asked. 'I would know if you are a despot so that I may see how to take precautions against you.' I answered that I had done nothing which could be injurious to the Church; that when I heard the basilica was invaded by soldiers, I had done nothing more than give free course to my lamentations, and that to those who came in great numbers to urge me to go there, I had said, 'I cannot hand over the basilica, but I may not offer violence'; that when I knew that the royal *velae* had been taken away, instead of yielding to the entreaties of the people who wanted me to go there, I contented myself with sending some priests without endeavouring to go there myself, and that I had cried out, 'By the Christ, I believe the Emperor will join our side. If this be despotism,' I added, 'these are my weapons, but I am only using them in the name of Christ. I am free to offer my life. Why do you hesitate to strike me if you consider me a tyrant? Under the Old Law, empires were bestowed by the priests, not usurped by them, and it is a well-known saying that emperors have aspired to the priest-

hood more than priests have coveted empire. Christ fled to escape being made King. We possess a peculiar kind of despotism—the despotism of the priest is his feebleness: ‘For when I am weak, then am I powerful’ (2 Cor., xii, 10). ‘But take heed lest he against whom God has raised no adversary, does not make himself his own tyrant. Maximus, who complains that my embassy closed to him access to Italy, does not say that I am a despot over Valentinian.’ And I added that priests had never been tyrants, but that they had often had to suffer from tyrants. All that day was passed under affliction. Meanwhile children, while playing, destroyed the royal *velae*. As for me, I was unable to regain my dwelling, for all around the basilica there were soldiers under orders to guard it. We recited the Psalms with our brethren in the small basilica.”

On the following day⁴⁵ there was a fresh sermon on the Book of Jonas. In it St. Ambrose announced the repentance of sinners to be near at hand. As a matter of fact, he had barely finished when reassuring news came.

“I heard that the troops had been withdrawn from the basilica by order of the Emperor, and that

⁴⁵ Good Friday, not Holy Thursday, as a certain number of critics state. See Rauschen's *Jahrb. der Christl. Kirche*, pp. 488–489.

the fines levied on the shopkeepers after their conviction, had been remitted. What joy for all the people! What cheering! What thanksgiving! It was the day on which the Lord had delivered Himself up for us, the day on which the penances imposed by the Church came to an end.⁴⁶ The soldiers vied with one another in spreading the glad news, and rushed towards the altars, embracing them in token of peace. Such are the events. Please God this may be the end. But the Emperor has uttered stormy words presaging further formidable crises. I am treated as a despot, and worse than a despot. When the *Comites* begged the Emperor to give in to the church, and assured him that they were only transmitting to him the desire of the troops, he replied, 'If Ambrose were to command it, you would hand me over to him loaded with fetters!' You may judge what we may expect after a speech like that! Every one cried out against these words, but there are some people who are inciting him against me. Finally Calligonus, the chamberlain,⁴⁷ dared to say to me in so many words: 'While I am living, do you hold Valentinian in contempt? I will have your head cut

⁴⁶ The absolution of penitents took place on Good Friday at Milan, as in Spain and the Churches of the East. In Rome it was given on Holy Thursday. (Cfr. Rauschen, *op. cit.*, p. 488).

⁴⁷ Calligonus was *praepositus sacri cubiculi*. He was beheaded some months later on the evidence of a courtesan. (Cfr. Augustine, *Contra Julianum Pelagianum*, VI, xiv, 41.)

off!" I replied, 'May God permit you to realise your threat! I shall suffer as bishops suffer. As for you, you will only be behaving like a eunuch.' May God be pleased to deliver the Church from them; let them exhaust all their shafts upon me and slake their thirst in my blood!"

In the following year (386) Justina endeavoured to contrive her revenge. She had succeeded in raising up a competitor against St. Ambrose in the person of a certain Mercurinus,⁴⁸ a Scythian by birth, who took the name of Auxentius in memory of the Arian predecessor of St. Ambrose in the episcopal see of Milan. Instigated by the new Bishop, Valentinian II, on the 23rd of January, 386, promulgated a law granting to the Arians, or more accurately to those who professed the *Formula* of Rimini, the right of assembly,⁴⁹ and, according to the testimony of St. Ambrose,⁵⁰ completed this measure by ordering

⁴⁸ Msgr. Duchesne (*Histoire Ancienne de l'Eglise*, Vol. II, p. 552, 1907) seems disposed to identify him with Auxentius, the Arian Bishop of Durostorum on the Lower Danube, who wrote an *Epistula Laudatoria* upon Ulfila, the Arian apostle of the Goths.

⁴⁹ *Cod. Theod.*, xvi, 1, 4, and 4, 1.

⁵⁰ *Ep.*, xxi, 11 and 12.

the churches to be handed over to the Arians, under pain of severe penalties.

But putting into execution this edict was found difficult. The court would have very much liked St. Ambrose to leave the city.⁵¹ But he changed nothing in the usual routine of his life. Then they conceived the idea of inviting him to appoint lay arbitrators, who should meet with other arbitrators chosen by Auxentius; after discussing the matter, the Emperor would decide between Auxentius and Ambrose.

St. Ambrose did not accept this arrangement. He wrote to Valentinian as follows:

“The Tribune and Secretary Dalmatius⁵² has come to me on the part of Your Clemency, he tells me, to inform me that I have to choose judges, as Auxentius has already done. He did not mention to me the names of those who have already been summoned. But he added that the discussion would take place in your consistory, and that Your Piety would be the final arbitrator. To this summons I return the answer which seems reasonable to me. No one will accuse me of rebellion, if I bring forward what your father, of august memory, replied by his own

⁵¹ Cf. *Sermo contra Auxentium*, § 15.

⁵² *Ep.*, xxi (*P. L.*, xvi, 1045).

mouth, and even sanctioned by a law⁵³: to wit, that, in matters of faith and in all questions relating to the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the judge must possess equal dignity and similar rights. These are the very terms of his rescript. In other words, it was his will that bishops should judge the cause of bishops. He even specified that if a bishop incurred an accusation, and an examination into his morals had to be made, the enquiry should be conducted by bishops. . . . When have you heard it said that in a matter of faith laymen have pronounced upon a bishop? Must we, through flattery, abase ourselves to the point of forgetting the rights attaching to the priesthood, and of abandoning to others the privilege with which God has honoured us? If a bishop is to take instructions from a layman, what will be the result? All the layman would have to do would be to discuss, and the bishop to listen and make himself the pupil of the layman. But if we interrogate the divine Scriptures and past times, who will dare to deny that in a matter of faith,—I say, in a matter of faith,—it was the bishops who were accustomed to be the judges of the emperors, and not the Christian emperors the judges of the bishops. By God's grace you will arrive at the matur-

⁵³ This is doubtless an allusion to the reply given by Valentinian I to the Bishops of the Hellespont and Bithynia, in *Sozomen, H. E.*, vi, 7. The law to which Ambrose alludes seems to be lost.

ity of old age and then you will appreciate what a bishop is worth who prostitutes the right of the priesthood to laymen. Your father who, by the grace of God, reached an advanced age, used to say: 'It is not my part to judge between bishops.' And Your Clemency now says: 'I, I ought to pronounce judgment.' Your father, who had been baptized in Jesus Christ, esteemed himself to be incapable of assuming the weight of such a decision. And Your Clemency, who has still to receive the Sacrament of Baptism, arrogate to yourself the right to judge matters of faith, while you are yet untouched by the Sacrament of faith! I leave others to imagine what kind of judges Auxentius will have chosen, since he is afraid to make public their names. Very well, then, let them come to the church; let them listen with the people. There is no necessity for any judge to sit; let each one examine as to which side he leans, and choose the one he would like to follow. The question at issue concerns the Bishop of this Church: if the people hear Auxentius, and find that he is a better disputant than I am, let them embrace his faith; I shall not be angry with them."

St. Ambrose then goes on to emphasize the contradiction in which Valentinian had involved himself. On the one hand, by the law promulgated on January 23rd, he forbade all

opposition, under whatever form it should manifest itself, to the decision which he should pronounce; and on the other hand, he accepted the principle of a disputation in which laymen, any first comers, should give or refuse their approval to this very law. "If Auxentius," he concludes, "calls for a synod in order to hold a disputation on the faith, I shall not fail to attend as soon as I know that it has assembled. But in that case, abrogate your law if you desire a discussion. . . ."

As in the previous year, it was during the weeks preceding the Festival of Easter that the storm which had been anticipated broke loose. The soldiers invested the Portian Basilica, where St. Ambrose was shut up with a multitude of the faithful. Alarmed by sinister rumours, which were running round as regards the designs of the court upon St. Ambrose, they implored the Bishop to remain in their midst, and set themselves against his leaving. In order to keep up the spirits of this crowd, who had nothing to occupy them, St. Ambrose conceived the idea of introducing into the office the practice of singing psalms

and hymns in two alternating choirs.⁵⁴ This practice appears to have taken its rise at Antioch. From there it spread through the Christian communities of the East,⁵⁵ notwithstanding the opposition of certain ecclesiastics, who were hostile to it either on account of this participation by the faithful, or because they disapproved of the principle itself.⁵⁶

Thanks to St. Ambrose's initiative, the practice henceforward formed part of the liturgy of the Church at Milan, and afterwards through-

⁵⁴ Cfr. *Vita S. Ambrosii*, by Paulinus, § 13: "*Hoc in tempore primum antiphonae, hymni et vigiliae in ecclesia Mediolanensi celebrari coeperunt. Cuius celebritatis devotio usque in hodiernum diem non solum in eadem ecclesia, verum per omnes paene provincias Occidentis manet.*" St. Augustine says the same in his *Confessions*, IX, vii, 15 (*P. L.*, xxxii, 770): "*Tunc hymni et psalmi ut canerentur secundum morem Orientalium partium, ne populus maioris taedio contabesceret, institutum est; ex illo in hodiernum retentum multis iam ac paene omnibus gregibus tuis et per cetera orbis imitantibus.*" See Förster, *Ambrosius, Bischof von Mailand*, pp. 253 sqq., and Zahn's *Neue Kirchl. Zeitschrift*, Vol. VII, pp. III sqq. (1896).

⁵⁵ Cf. Socrates, *H. E.*, vi, 8; Theodoret, *H. E.*, ii, 24; and Basil, *Ep.*, ccvii, 2-4 (*P. G.*, xxxii, 762).

⁵⁶ Cf. the *De Psalmodiae Bono*, attributed to Niceta of Remesiana (Burns' ed., Cambridge, 1905, p. 68), § 2: "*Scio nonnullos non solum in nostris, sed etiam in orientalibus esse partibus, qui superfluum nec minus congruentem divinae religioni estimant psalmorum et hymnorum decantationem. Sufficere enim putant, quod corde dicitur, lascivum esse, si hoc lingua proferatur.*"

out the West. St. Ambrose himself wrote a certain number of hymns, as had St. Hilary before him, to serve by a skilful method of propaganda⁵⁷ the purposes of orthodoxy as against the Arians.

"They say," he remarks in his *Sermo contra Auxentium*, "that I have bewitched the people by the verses of my hymns. Just so! I do not deny it. I possess therein a beautiful magical chant, more potent than any other. For what is more potent than the confession of the Trinity intoned every day by the voice of the whole people? All vie with one another in proclaiming their faith. They have learnt how to celebrate in verse the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. And now we find past masters among those who before were hardly in a position to become disciples."⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Of the hymns called "Ambrosian," four are certainly authentic, namely, *Aeterne rerum conditor*, *Deus Creator omnium*, *Iam surgit hora tertia*, and *Veni Redemptor gentium*. Eight others are doubtful. See Ermoni's *Ambroise S., Hymnographie*, in the *Dict. d'Archéol. Chrét. et de Liturgie*, I, 1347 sqq. Like Hilary, Ambrose chose the acatalectic iambic dimeter for his metre, which had been very popular since the time of Hadrian. (Cfr. Puech's *Prudentius*, p. 270, Paris, 1887). As regards his prosody, and the music which he certainly composed, see Schanz's *Gesch. d. Röm. Litter.*, IV, I, p. 207.

⁵⁸ § 34 (*P. L.*, xvi, 1060).

It was during these days of voluntary captivity that St. Ambrose delivered, on Palm Sunday, a sermon against Auxentius,⁵⁹ in whom he recognized the principal instigator of all the machinations directed against the Catholics.

“I perceive,” he said to his congregation, “that some sudden and unusual trouble has taken possession of you, and that you are watching me. I am astonished at this, unless it be that you have seen or heard that I have received from the hands of the Tribunes an imperial order notifying me to withdraw to wherever it pleases me, and authorizing those wishing to follow me to leave with me. You are, therefore, in fear lest I abandon the church and leave you in order to safeguard my life. But you will have known what my reply was. I said that the wish to leave the church could not enter into my heart, because I feared the Lord of the universe more than the Emperor of this present world; that if they snatched me from the church by violence, they could indeed take my body away, but not my soul; that I was ready, if the Emperor exercised his power against me, to submit to the usual fate

⁵⁹ *P. L.*, xvi, 1049.

of bishops. Why then all this emotion? I will never leave you of my free will. Nevertheless, if they would use force, I should offer no resistance. I could only grieve, weep, and lament. Against arms, against the soldiers, against the Goths, my only weapon shall be my tears—for a bishop these are his means of defence. . . . They have suggested to me to hand over the vessels of the church. I replied that if they were asking anything which belonged to me,—lands, houses, gold, silver, anything that I had the right to dispose of, I would give it willingly; but that I could take nothing from the temple of God, nor deliver up what I have received to guard, and not to surrender; that in addition, I had concern for the salvation of the Emperor; that it did not beseem him to receive them from me any more than it beseemed me to hand them over to him; that he would be so good as to hearken to the voice of a bishop speaking in all frankness; and in his own interest, too, that he would stop short of offending Jesus Christ. Words full of humility, full also, as it seems to me, of the affection which a bishop owes to his Emperor. . . . Lord Jesus, in one instant You ransomed the world. Must Auxentius too in

one instant be permitted to butcher as many people as he wishes, some by the sword, others by sacrilege? With his blood-stained mouth, with his soiled hands, he demands my basilica. The Scripture read to-day answers him well: 'But to the sinner God hath said: Why dost thou declare my justices?' (Ps., xlix, 16), which means: there is nothing in common between peace and fury, nothing in common between Christ and Belial. . . . The Lord Jesus excluded from His temple only a handful of merchants: Auxentius has left no one inside. Jesus used a whip to drive them out: Auxentius uses a sword. Yes, Jesus used a whip, Mercurinus an axe. In his goodness the Lord drove out the sacrilegious men with a whip: this perverted man pursues the good with steel. Of him you have justly said to-day, 'Let him take away his laws and himself!' Yes, he will take them away, even against his liking. And he will take away his soul marked in characters of blood. And thus, grown fat on blood, and breathing nothing but carnage, does he dare to talk of conferring with me? . . . What I am saying is marked with all the respect due to the Emperor,—no one can deny it. What can be a greater honour than to call him a son

of the Church? To speak thus is to speak without sin, to speak with the divine favour. The Emperor is within the Church; he is not above it. A good emperor seeks the assistance of the Church; he does not refuse it. I say this with humility, but I say it publicly and with firmness. They threaten us with fire, the sword, and deportation. As servants of Christ, we have learnt to have no fear. When one fears not, no dread becomes serious. And it is written: 'The arrows of children are their wounds.' (Ps., LXIII, 7)."

Such a critical state of affairs could not last. The court being extremely embarrassed as to what decision to come to, and not feeling sufficiently strong to reduce the resistance of the populace by violence, was very glad when an unexpected event, the discovery of the relics of the martyrs Gervasius and Protasius, provided a pretext for a kind of implied amnesty. We possess an account of this event, sent by St. Ambrose to his sister.⁶⁰ It took place on the 17th of June, 386; St. Augustine was a

⁶⁰ *Ep.* xxii (*P. L.*, xvi, 1062).

witness and appears to have been much impressed.⁶¹

“It is my custom to keep you fully informed of all that takes place here during your absence. Know, then, that we have found the bodies of some holy martyrs. When I had dedicated the basilica, many unanimously urged and begged me to consecrate it, as I had done the Roman basilica. ‘Gladly will I do so,’ I replied, ‘but on condition that I find some relics of the martyrs.’ At that very moment I felt within me the prophetic ardour. But wherefore all these words? The Lord has favoured us with His grace. My clerics were all trembling when I had a hole dug before the railings in front of Saints Felix and Nabor. I discovered the signs I was looking for. They brought some who were possessed in order that we might lay our hands on them, and the power of the holy martyrs became so manifest that before even we had said a word, a woman⁶² was caught up and cast to the ground before the holy tomb. We found two men of surprising stature, like those of the old legends. The bones

⁶¹ Cfr. *Conf.*, ix, 7; *De Civit. Dei*, XXII, viii, 2; *Retract.*, I, xiii, 7; *Sermo 286 in Die natali S. Gervasii et Protasii*, v, 4 (*P. L.*, xxxviii, 1299).

⁶² The correction *una*, for *urna* given in the manuscripts, seems to be required by the context.

were intact, and there was much blood. During these two days the throng of people was immense. Briefly, we disposed these remains in fitting order, and in the evening bore them to the Faustan basilica. There a vigil was held all through the night, with imposition of hands. On the following day⁶³ we transferred [the relics] to the basilica which they call the Ambrosian.⁶⁴ During the transfer a blind man was cured."

St. Ambrose in an enthusiastic sermon on this occasion celebrated the divine favour whereby the Church of Milan, hitherto barren of martyrs, could now honour herself with sons glorious and truly worthy of her. On the following day the inhumation of the two bodies took place, and in another discourse the Bishop extolled the wonderful power shown by martyrs, of which the people of Milan already had received proof.⁶⁵

The joy of the people was such that it

⁶³ 18th of June.

⁶⁴ Built in 379 by St. Ambrose, and consecrated in April, 386.

⁶⁵ St. Augustine offers his testimony on this point (*P. L.*, xxxviii, 1299): "*Ibi eram, Mediolani eram, facta miracula novi, attestante Deo pretiosis mortibus sanctorum suorum: ut per illa miracula iam non solum in conspectu Domini, sed etiam in conspectu hominum esset mors illa pretiosa.*"

would have been highly imprudent to disturb them, and so the persecution ceased.

Without having either encouraged or tolerated any violence against duly established authority, without having deviated from "the modesty of a subject and a bishop," in the words of Bossuet,⁶⁶ St. Ambrose had emerged with honour from a conflict which might have become perilous. He had succeeded in drawing still closer the bonds of solidarity and confidence which united him to his flock. He had taken pains to keep them in touch with every move, and not to act without their approval. And while Auxentius had hardly been able to recruit his partisans, except from among foreigners,⁶⁷ he (St. Ambrose) had had the profound satisfaction of feeling himself in full community of soul with those whose religious and moral direction he had undertaken.

DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS

Letter xxiv, which we are about to read, is interesting from the fact that it informs us of the two diplomatic missions to Maximus with which St. Ambrose was charged.

⁶⁶ *Politique tirée de l'Ecriture Sainte*, VI, 2.

⁶⁷ Cfr. *Ep.*, xxi, 8 (*P. L.*, xvi, 1047).

The first of these took place in the winter of 383-4, some months after the assassination of Gratian. Maximus was threatening the Alps and it was a question of obtaining from him a peace to which he was bound to refuse his consent. Touched by the tender years of the young Emperor Valentinian,⁶⁸ St. Ambrose accepted the responsibility of these difficult negotiations. Notwithstanding the scant amount of good will she entertained towards him, Justina, the Empress-mother, came to the conclusion that she could not find a more faithful or more skilful ambassador than him.

Aware of the difficulties of the situation, St. Ambrose bore without complaint the haughty demeanour of Maximus. He kept silent under his most justifiable susceptibilities, and by skilfully temporizing, he gave Justina and Valentinian time to fortify the passages of the Alps, and with the aid of Theodosius, to prepare for defence.

The second mission of St. Ambrose is generally placed by historians in 386 or 387.⁶⁹ It

⁶⁸ "*Ego te suscepi parvulum, cum legatus ad hostem tuum pergerem.*" (*De Obitu Valentiniani Consolatio*, § 28; *P. L.*, xvi, 1428).

⁶⁹ Cfr. Tillemont, *Mémoires*, Vol. X, p. 195 (Venice, 1732);

seems very probable that it took place one or two years earlier, during the winter of 384-5. Independently of a certain number of likely reasons which incline us to this assumption, a passage in letter xxiv seems to be decisive. St. Ambrose says therein (§12) that he had withdrawn from communion with the bishops who were demanding the death of certain heretics. Now this referred to the Priscillianists. Therefore Priscillian and his disciples had not yet been executed at that date. As a matter of fact they were put to death in 385. It is hardly conceivable that on the very morrow of the disagreements which set St. Ambrose and Justina one against the other, near Easter 385, the latter would have had recourse to his services. We may thus assign this second embassy to the beginning of the year 385, or to the last months of 384.

The object assigned to St. Ambrose's diplomacy was to request from Maximus the body of Gratian in order to render to it the honours it had not yet received. Letter xxiv is a report addressed to the Emperor Valentinian

Ihm's *Studia Ambrosiana*, pp. 9 and 46; de Broglie's *Saint Ambroise*, p. 107.

on the circumstances and results of his mission.⁷⁰

"You have," he says, "sufficiently proved the fidelity with which I acquitted myself on my first embassy by not having called me to account for it. It was clearly seen that, after being detained some days in Gaul, I did not accede to the wishes of Maximus, and that I did not give my assent to proposals which flattered his aims more than they could contribute to peace. Moreover, you would not have intrusted me with a second embassy if you had not been satisfied with the first. But inasmuch as, at the moment of my arrival, Maximus obliged me to enter into strife with him, I should like in this letter to relate the results of my mission. By this means I shall avoid mingling the false with the true by the chatter of chance-comers before I have had the opportunity of giving you, on my return, a complete and trustworthy account of what has taken place. On the morrow of my arrival at Treves I went to the palace. The Chamberlain Gallicanus, one of the royal eunuchs, came out to meet me. I prayed him to allow me to enter. He asked if I bore a reply in writing from

⁷⁰ *P. L.*, xvi, 1079.

Your Clemency. I replied that I did. He answered that I could only have an audience in the council. I observed that this was not at all the customary manner of receiving a bishop, and that certain matters demanded that I should have a serious interview with the Prince. Briefly, he consulted his master and brought back the same answer, which made me understand very well that he had spoken the first time according to orders. I nevertheless remarked that such a reception was little suited to my dignity, but added that, for all that, I should not fail of the mission which had been entrusted to me, and that I willingly accepted a humiliation, more especially on your account, and in a matter (am I not right?) which concerned your affection for your brother. As soon as Maximus had taken his seat at the council, I was introduced. He rose to give me the kiss. I remained standing in the midst of the councillors. They invited me to go up the steps to him. I made answer, 'Why should you embrace a man whom you do not know? If you know me, it is not here that you should have received me.' 'You are angry, Bishop?' 'The outrage touches me little, but I am hurt at finding myself in a place where I should not have ap-

peared.' 'But you have already appeared before the council at the time of your first embassy.' 'That was not my fault, but the fault of him who summoned me before it.' 'Why then did you appear?' 'Because at that time I was asking for peace on behalf of one weaker than you. To-day I am asking it for an equal.' 'And whom has he to thank for having become my equal?' 'It is thanks to God Almighty who has preserved to Valentinian the throne which He has given him.' Finally he could restrain himself no longer. 'Yes,' he cried, 'You have made a mockery of me, you and that man Bauton,⁷¹ who was anxious to secure for himself the supreme power under cover of a mere child, and sent the barbarians against me—just as if I too had not enough of them to oppose against him, men fighting for me and in my pay. If I had not been kept back at the time of your first journey, who could have resisted me, or withstood my power?' 'It is useless for

⁷¹ The *Comes* Bauton was a Frank by birth. He was *magister militum* under Gratian and Valentinian II, and consul in 385. He enjoyed great influence with Valentinian, and died before 388. It is difficult to decide whether he was a Christian or a pagan on account of the ambiguity of an expression of St. Ambrose in this connection in *Ep.* lvii, 3. His daughter, Eudoxia, later married the Emperor Arcadius. (Cfr. Zosimus, IV, 33).

you to get angry,' I replied gently. 'You have no cause. Listen patiently to what I have to say in answer to what you have just uttered. If I have come, it is because you pretend that, having trusted me at the time of my first embassy, you were deceived. A glorious reproach, since thereby I saved an Emperor who was quite a child! Who has a better right than bishops to undertake the defence of extreme youth? It is written: "Judge for the fatherless, defend the widow, relieve the oppressed" (Is. I, 17), and again: "Be ye the judges of the widow and the fathers of the orphan." Nevertheless I will not reproach Valentinian for the service I rendered him. To come to things as they are: When did I prevent your legions from inundating Italy? What cliffs, what army, what soldiers have I opposed against you? Was it with my body that I closed the Alps to you? Would to heaven I had been able to! I should then have had no reason to fear your reproaches or your accusations. With what promises did I mock you in order to make you acquiesce in making peace? Did not the *Comes* Victor come to meet me in Gaul as far as Mayence to ask for peace? In what respect, therefore, has Valentinian deceived you, since

you asked peace from him even before he had asked it of you? How has Bauton deceived you by testifying his devotion to his Emperor? Is it because he did not betray his master? And how have I circumvented you? As soon as I arrived, you declared that Valentinian must come to you like a child to his father. I replied that it was not good for a child to cross the Alps with his widowed mother at the most rigorous period of the winter, and that without his mother one could not expose him to all the dangers of so long a journey, and that the object of my mission was to negotiate peace, not to promise that they would come. It is clear that I could not authorize what was not in my instructions, and that I did not make any engagement on that head. This is so true that you said at the time, 'Let us wait for the reply which Victor ⁷² is bringing to us.' Every one knows that while I was being detained, he arrived at Milan and his request was refused. They were anxious only for peace, and there was no question of the Emperor coming, as he could not stir from there. I was present when Victor returned. How then was it in my power to modify the intentions of Valentinian? Fur-

⁷² The son of Maximus.

ther, he sent deputies to Gaul to say he would not come. They met me at Valence, in Gaul. On looking round I found soldiers of both sides guarding the heights on the mountains. Where were the armies I turned from your allegiance, where the eagles I caused to retire from Italy, where the barbarians which Count Bauton sent against you? If Bauton had done these things, how would that have been astonishing? He was born on the other side of the Rhine, and were you not yourself threatening to make an assault on the Roman Empire with barbarian hordes and cavalry from over the frontiers, drawn from these races to whom the convoys from the provinces paid tribute? See what a difference between your threats and the mildness of the august child Valentinian. *You* were bent upon inundating Italy with barbarian cohorts; *he* caused the Huns and Alani approaching from Gaul, to withdraw towards Germany.⁷³ How was Bauton to blame for having set barbarian against barbarian? While you were employing Roman soldiers, who were everywhere pitching their

⁷³ In 384. It was Count Bauton who forced them to operate this movement, which by a counter stroke decided the Juthungi to return to their country to defend it against the invaders.

tents for battle, the Juthungi were ravaging Rhetia at the very heart of the Roman Empire. This was the reason for pitting the Huns against the Juthungi. But when the former were laying waste Germany and threatening Gaul with the same acts of violence, we obliged them to abandon their triumphant course in order that you might have nothing to fear from them. Compare your actions with his: *you* caused Rhetia to be devastated; Valentinian purchased a peace for you with his money.⁷⁴ Look also at him who is seated at your right hand.⁷⁵ Valentinian had it in his power to avenge his resentment upon him; he sent him back to you with honour. He had him on his own territory, at the very time when he learnt of the death of his brother; he knew how to restrain his anger. He had no mind to render you like for like by causing the death of this man, who, if he was not at all Gratian's equal in dignity, was at least your own brother. Compare your attitude and his [Valentinian's]; I will make you the judge. He gave you back your brother alive; give him back his, dead

⁷⁴ He gave large sums to the Huns and Alani to persuade them to depart from the frontiers of Gaul.

⁷⁵ Marcellinus, the brother of Maximus.

though he be. How can you refuse his brother's remains to one who did not refuse you the man who was an abettor against himself? You fear that the restitution of the mortal remains of Gratian may re-awaken the grief of the soldiers. For this is the reason you allege. What! *They* abandoned him when living; would they defend him now that he no longer exists? Why do you fear him when dead, you who killed him when it was in your power to have saved him? I got rid of an enemy, you may say. He was not your enemy; but it was you who were his. . . . If any one to-day were to plot to rob you of your empire over these provinces, would you say that *you* were *his* enemy, and not rather that it was *he* who was *yours*? Either I am much mistaken, or he who declares war is the usurper; the Emperor himself is only defending his rights. Against all justice you caused Gratian to be assassinated, and would you refuse his body? At least let Valentinian have the mortal remains of his brother as a pledge of the promised peace. How can you maintain that you did not give the order to kill him if you refuse him proper burial? Will people believe that you did not grudge him his life, if you grudge him a tomb? But

to come back to myself. I understand that you complain that those around the Emperor Valentinian preferred to have recourse to the Emperor Theodosius.⁷⁶ Can you expect anything else, you who sought to punish them when they were seeking a refuge, you who condemned them to death if they were captured, while Theodosius loaded them with presents and honours? 'Whom have I put to death?' asked Maximus. 'Vallio,' for example, 'and what a man, what a fine soldier, to boot! Was it right to destroy him because he was faithful to his Emperor?' 'But it was not I who gave the order to kill him.' 'We have found out,' I replied, 'that this order was given.' 'If he had not put himself to death, I had commanded that he was to be taken to Châlons and burnt alive.' 'That is precisely why people believed that you put him to death. Who could hope to be spared by you after the murder of so courageous a soldier, of one so trusty, of a count so useful to the Empire?' I then withdrew, and he told me he would think the matter over. Then seeing that I kept myself

⁷⁶ A probable allusion to Merobaudes and others who had been in the immediate entourage of Gratian, and who, after his assassination, had passed over to Valentinian, and then to Theodosius.

apart from fellowship with the bishops who were in communication with him, and who were demanding the death of certain unfortunate persons, heretics though they were,⁷⁷ he got angry and ordered me to leave. I gladly obeyed, although it was generally thought that I would not be able to escape ambushes they were preparing against me. I left, therefore, with no other regret than that of seeing Hyginus,⁷⁸ that aged bishop, who had only a breath of life left in him, cast into exile. When I went to beg the *comites* not to drive out an old man without clothing and without a bed to sleep on, they drove me out too. This is the account of my embassy. I salute you, Emperor; be prepared against a man who under the guise of peace is plotting war.”

St. Ambrose's intuition was correct, as we shall see. The Court, however, affected to be-

⁷⁷ We know the long continued fury with which the Spanish bishops Itacius of Ossonuba and Hydatius of Emerita, supported by certain members of the episcopate in Gaul, persecuted Priscillian and his disciples. They succeeded in getting them condemned to death by Maximus on the report of the Prefect Evodius. See Puech in the *Journal des Savants*, 1891, p. 248 sqq., and Duchesne, *Histoire Ancienne de l'Eglise*, Vol. II (1907), pp. 529 sqq.

⁷⁸ Bishop of Cordova, favourable to Priscillianism. (Cfr. Sulp. Severus, *Chron.*, II, 47, 3.)

lieve that if St. Ambrose had not had greater success, it was because his natural inflexibility had compromised the success of the negotiations. They sent a Syrian called Domninos, in whom they looked for greater suppleness, with the mission to conclude an alliance with Maximus, and to solicit his support against the barbarians who were threatening Pannonia. Maximus received Domninos in a most flattering manner. But when, loaded with presents and promises, he took his departure, Maximus followed him with all his troops, crossed the Alps without meeting any resistance, and descended upon Italy. Justina and Valentinian fled to Aquileia, thence to Thessalonica. In January, 388, Rome fell into the hands of Maximus.

All would have been lost but for the energetic intervention of Theodosius, who for a long time past had foreseen the coming events and had taken steps to prepare for them. Leaving his son Arcadius with his wife Galla at Constantinople, he set out, accompanied by Valentinian and, possibly, Justina. Two battles, one at Siscia in Pannonia, the other at Betovia in Styria, decided the fate of the opposing armies. Driven back, Maximus shut

himself up with a few troops in Aquileia. He was captured in a *sortie*, deprived of his insignia and brought before Theodosius. Possibly the latter might have granted him his life, but the soldiers guarding him assassinated him, three miles from Aquileia. Some weeks after his son Victor, who was still holding out in Gaul, was taken prisoner and put to death. The dignities which had been conferred upon Maximus, and a large number of his legislative and judicial decrees, were pronounced null and void.⁷⁹ Theodosius and Valentinian became the lords of the Roman world, the former in the full vigour of his manhood (he was between 40 and 50 years old)⁸⁰ and with the *prestige* of having saved a situation which would have been irremediably lost save for him; the latter still very young and predisposed to a tutelage which his very gratitude made it incumbent upon him to accept.

From this date "a real mutual confidence, which could not have been closer, was established between Ambrose and Theodosius, such

⁷⁹ Law of 22 Sept. 388 (*Cod. Theod.*, XV, xiv, 6), and of 10 Oct. 388 (*Cod. Theod.* XV, xiv, 7). These laws were extended to Gaul in January, 389 (*Cod. Theod.*, XV, xiv, 8).

⁸⁰ The historians are not in agreement as to the date of his birth.

as might have been expected from a community of views and sentiments on all points they had to treat of in common. To both of them the close union between Church and Empire was not only their unceasing policy, but, as it were, the foundation of what we should call a political and social system which they held in common. . . . Not that we cannot recognise something similar to the paternal protection which Ambrose had been obliged to accord to the youth and inexperience of Gratian. Theodosius, who had reached the height of his power and attainments, and was in the full maturity of his years and intellect, did not seek, and would probably not have accepted, any tutelage. But he had no cause to fear it . . . Between the Bishop and the Emperor,—each meritorious, each fully competent for their task,—there existed a loyal and virile friendship, based on a solid foundation of esteem and sympathy. On rare occasions Ambrose had to come forth from his reserve in order to defend what he considered to be his rights as a bishop, or one of those great moral laws whose guardianship and sanction God has entrusted to His Church. When that was necessary, he did not

wait to be consulted; but offered, or rather imposed, his opinion.”⁸¹

THE AFFAIR OF CALLINICUM

Situated on the left bank of the Euphrates, the town of Callinicum was one of the principal cities of the province of Osroene in Mesopotamia. Ammianus Marcellinus⁸² calls it *munimentum robustum et commercandi opimitate gratissimum*, and Theodoret⁸³ describes it as “a very important fortified place.” It had become a Roman possession after the conquest of Osroene by Marcus Aurelius in 164, and the country was reduced to a Roman province in 199 under Septimius Severus.

In the course of the year 388 Theodosius learnt from a report from the *Comes Orientis*, in his capacity as commander of the troops in the East, that this town had just been the scene of grave disorders. A procession of monks had been hustled by the partisans of a Gnostic sect and had taken their revenge by setting fire to a sanctuary belonging to the latter. What was

⁸¹ De Broglie, *Saint Ambroise*, p. 129.

⁸² XXIII, iii, 7.

⁸³ *Relig. Hist.*, § 26.

still more regrettable, and appears to have arrested the attention of the Emperor, was the burning of a Jewish synagogue at the instigation of the bishop of that place.

Concerned as he was for the maintenance of public order, Theodosius could not remain indifferent in the face of such occurrences. Twenty years before,⁸⁴ the Emperor Julian had not hesitated to command Eleuzos, Bishop of Cyzicus, to rebuild a Novatian church which had been destroyed by the Catholics, and to exile Eleuzos, together with a number of his clergy. This rigour, it is true, may be partly explained by the profound hostility which animated Julian against those whom he called "the Galileans." But without going to such lengths, it was at least desirable to show disapproval of, and to punish, acts of violence apparently committed with the complicity of ecclesiastical authority. Whatever disfavour the Christian State might show towards Judaism, the latter had never been placed outside the law and treated as a crime.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ In 362, cfr. Socrates, *H. E.*, III, ii.

⁸⁵ On this point see Duquesne's translation, *Droit Pénal Romain*, of Mommsen (Paris, 1907, II, p. 321 sqq.), and the article *Judaei* in Daremberg and Saglio. A certain number of legal disabilities weighed on the Jews. Thus, renewing a pro-

In spite of their religion, justice was due to the Jews who had suffered damage.

Theodosius ordered the synagogue to be rebuilt at the expense of the bishop, and those who had taken part in these seditious acts to be punished.

St. Ambrose was at Aquileia⁸⁶ when this edict was issued. The action taken by the Emperor seemed to him to be excessive and prejudicial to the interests of the Church, and he determined to oppose it. He came back to Milan and perceiving that the Emperor was evading his requests for an audience, wrote him the following letters⁸⁷ from that city.⁸⁸

“Though overwhelmed by continual anxieties, I have never experienced one more acute than the present, when I am considering the precautions I must

hibition of Constantius II, Gratian had promulgated on May 21, 383, the *poena instabilitatis* against Christians who passed over to Judaism (*Cod. Theod.*, xvi, 7, 2 and 3). The Jews were forbidden to have Christian slaves (*Cod. Theod.*, iii, 1, 5; law of Sept., 384). Theodosius had no scruples in likening marriage between Jews and Christians to adultery (*Cod. Theod.*, iii, 7, 2, and ix, 7, 5; law of 13 March 388), etc.

⁸⁶ Cf. *Ep.*, xli, 1.

⁸⁷ *Ep.* xl, (*P. L.*, xvi, 1148).

⁸⁸ Not Aquileia as Tillemont thinks (*Mem.*, x, 204, art. 55). See Rauschen on this point (*Jahrb. d. Christl. Kirche*, pp. 532 sqq.).

take to avoid any participation in the threatened sacrilege. I ask you, therefore, to hear patiently what I have to say. For if I am not worthy that you should listen to me, I am also unworthy to offer the Holy Sacrifice for you and to take upon myself your wishes and your prayers. Will you not then give heed to one whom you hope that God will hear on your behalf? Will you not listen to me when I am speaking for myself, after having heard me when I spoke for others? And ought you not to be apprehensive of your decision when, by deeming me unworthy to be heard by you, you will be making me unworthy to be heard [when praying] on your behalf? It is neither the part of an emperor to refuse liberty of speech, nor that of a bishop to refrain from saying what he thinks. . . . I prefer to share with you in prosperity and misfortune; this is a reason why for a bishop to keep silent should be displeasing to Your Clemency, and his freedom [to speak] should please. For my silence would create a peril in which you would be enveloped, while you will feel, on the contrary, the benefit arising from my freedom. I am not a troublesome meddler who mixes himself in what does not concern him, or intrudes into other people's affairs; I obey the call of my duty and the commands of God. . . ."

After fresh appeals to the customary forbearance of the Emperor, and to his desire to

be enlightened, especially when "God's cause" was at stake, St. Ambrose states and comments on the facts as follows:—

"The *Comes Orientis* commanding the troops brought to your notice that a synagogue had been burnt down at the instigation of the bishop. You have given orders to proceed with severity against the other authors of the crime, and that the synagogue be rebuilt by the bishop himself. I do not wish to insist upon the point that the bishop's report should have been waited for, for bishops are the natural restraining influence of the crowd; they love peace, at least so long as they are not provoked by an injury committed against God, or by an outrage to the Church. I admit that this bishop was too hot-headed in burning the synagogue, and his judgment was not well founded. But have you no misgivings, O Emperor, as to whether he will bow to your sentence? Have you no fear that he may fall into a betrayal of his trust? Do you not conceive, too, that he may refuse to comply with the orders of your *Comes*? The latter will in that case be reduced to the necessity of making him an apostate or a martyr,—alternatives no longer conformable to an epoch such as yours, and both resembling persecution, whether the bishop be compelled to commit an act of apostasy or to suffer martyrdom. Do you judge him to be a courageous man? Take heed,

then, not to make this stalwart into a martyr. Do you consider he may be a weakling? Spare this frail man from ruin, for more grievous is the sin when a weak man is made to fall. I clearly see what the bishop will say under the circumstances. He will say that it was he who set the match to the fire, that he excited the sedition and stirred up the people. He will not wish to lose the occasion of martyrdom, or to give place to a more vigorous champion of those lacking fortitude. . . . And now let us suppose that no one forces the bishop to do this rebuilding, for I have begged this of Your Clemency; and though I have not yet read that the edict has been revoked, I should like to be able to acknowledge that this has been done. What will happen if others, more timid, from fear of death, come to offer of their substance to rebuild the synagogue, and that the *Comes*, seeing that all is in order, should himself command this rebuilding with the money of Christians? Would you have, then, O Emperor, an apostate *Comes*? It is to him that you intrust your victorious ensigns, your *Labarum*, the standard consecrated with the name of Christ. And is he to go and restore a synagogue wherein Christ is despised? Only give the command that the *Labarum* be carried into a synagogue, and we shall soon see if you can bring *that* about!

“And are the spoils taken from the church to be used in rebuilding an edifice which shelters the per-

fidy of the Jews? Is the patrimony wherewith the love of Christ has enriched Christians to pass into the hands of these perfidious men? We read that in former days temples to idols were built from the spoils taken from the Cimbrians, and from the booty levied from other enemies. To-day it will be the Jews who will place on the forefront of their synagogue this inscription: 'Temple of Impiety: Erected from the spoils taken from the Christians.' Reasons springing from considerations of public order move you, O Emperor. But which should carry the day—the apparent interests of public order, or those of religion? Needs must in this case the severity of the laws give place to pious considerations. Have you not heard tell that, when Julian determined to restore the Temple at Jerusalem, the workmen who were cleaning the place were destroyed by fire from Heaven? Have you no fear that this prodigy may repeat itself on this occasion? Is it not enough to turn you from giving such an order that Julian once before did the same thing? Whence springs your lively concern? Is it because a public building has been burnt, no matter what, or only because it is a synagogue? If you take to heart the burning of such a paltry edifice (what else could it be in a town one has hardly even heard of?), do you not call to mind how many palaces belonging to prefects have been burnt in Rome without any one taking vengeance? Any emperor wishing to

punish these acts severely, only succeeded in aggravating the position of the man who had already suffered such serious losses. Which therefore is the more fitting,—if punishment must be exacted at all costs,—to punish for a fire that has taken place in some quarter of Callinicum, or one in Rome itself? The bishop's palace at Constantinople was burnt recently, and Your Clemency's son interceded with his father, begging him not to avenge the affront,—I mean the affront done to the Emperor's son—nor the burning of the episcopal palace. . . . The father rightly granted this favour to his son. . . . You could refuse nothing to your son: be careful then not to be sparing in anything towards God.

“It is not worth your while to be so greatly concerned, nor to proceed with such severity against the people because a building has been burnt; still less when it is a synagogue, that is to say, a place of perfidy, a house of impiety, a nest of folly, which God Himself condemned by the mouth of Jeremias. . . . God forbid that men pray to Him on behalf of the Jews, and you, do *you* wish to avenge them?

“Ah! in very truth, if I had a mind to invoke people's rights, I could mention how many Christian basilicas the Jews burned in the reign of Julian. Two at Damascus: one has been barely restored, but at the expense of the Church, and not by the

synagogue; the other still exhibits the lamentable spectacle of its ruin. Basilicas have been burnt at Gaza, Ascalon, and Beryte, and in almost all these towns no one has demanded reparation. The basilica at Alexandria, the most beautiful of all, was burnt by the pagans and Jews. The Church was not avenged—and is the synagogue to have this satisfaction? Is the burning down of the sanctuary of the Valentinians to be avenged as well? . . . The pagans only invoke twelve gods, they [the Valentinians] adore thirty-two Aeons, whom they call gods. I am aware, moreover, that orders were given to proceed with severity against some monks who, exasperated by the insolence of the Valentinians when they tried to bar their way as they were proceeding to the famous sanctuary of the Machabees, chanting psalms as is their custom, burnt their temple which had been hastily put up in some village. . . . The Jews have set fire to Christian basilicas, and there has been no restitution, no claim, no enquiry. What valuable possessions could a synagogue, built in such a far-away town, have owned? All this is merely the trickery of the Jews who have only one idea, and that is to calumniate. . . . And upon whom do they wish to bring these calumnies to bear? Whom will they not accuse of having been the authors of this rising, in order to give themselves the pleasure of seeing a vast number of Christians loaded with chains, and the servants of God cast

into dark dungeons, struck down by the executioner's axe, delivered to be burned, or shut up in the mines in order to prolong their punishment? Will *you* provide for these Jews this triumph over the Church of God, this trophy taken from Christ's people? Will *you* afford this joy to these perfidious men? . . . In that case the Jewish people will rank that fine day among their festivals, and will count it a day like the one on which they triumphed over the Amorrites or the Chanaanites, or escaped from the hands of Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, or from Nabuchodonosor, the King of Babylon. Yes, they will add this day to be solemnly kept in order to mark their triumph over Christ's people.

"They declare they are not bound by Roman laws, and regard them as criminal; nevertheless we see them claiming in this case these very laws whereby to avenge themselves. Where were these laws invoked when they set fire to the roof of sacred basilicas? Julian did not avenge the Church because he was an apostate; will *you* then exact reparation for the injury done to the synagogue, because you are a Christian?"

St. Ambrose then reminds the Emperor of the special benefits whereby Providence had manifested its protection to him. He brings before his eyes the disturbing example of the

usurper Maximus, who, under colour of defending the public order, had ordered a synagogue, which had been burnt in Rome, to be rebuilt, and who, in addition to the unpopularity he had acquired by that action, had thereafter encountered nothing but failure.⁸⁹ He concludes in these terms:

“My affection, and my devotion to you, O Emperor, have dictated these words. . . . It would be a strange thing to place your faith in jeopardy for the Jews. . . . If my personal credit is too insignificant, would you be good enough to assemble the bishops as it may please you? Let them examine what can be done without injury to the faith. If in money matters you consult your *Comites*, how much more equitable is it that you should consult the ministers of the Lord in questions of religion? May Your Clemency take note of the many enemies the Church has watching her and contriving ambushes against her. Wherever they discover a little crack, there they implant their sting. . . . What reply can I make later on when people learn that it was on orders issued from here that Christians have perished by the sword, from scourging, from the lead mines? How shall I justify action such as this? How shall

⁸⁹ This action evidently refers to the year 388, during which Maximus was the master of Rome.

I excuse myself before the other bishops? . . . Annul, therefore, and reject this decision which is causing me much anguish, such legitimate anguish. . . . You still have need to make your supplications in order to deserve the clemency of the Lord that it may descend upon the Roman Empire. You have children for whom you form hopes still higher than for yourself. May their glory, their salvation assist my words to touch you. . . . You have pardoned the inhabitants of Antioch the injury they inflicted on you. You have recalled the daughters of your enemy [Maximus] in order to have them educated by a relative. You have assigned a pension to his mother out of your treasury. So much good feeling, so much faith, would be secured by an act like this. You have spared your enemies in arms, you have preserved the lives of your adversaries: do not, I beg of you, put so much zeal into taking severe measures against Christians!

“And now I implore you not to receive me with contempt: it is for my own sake and for yours also that I fear. . . . I have done everything befitting the respect that is your right; for I would prefer to be heard at the palace rather than to find myself obliged to compel attention in church.”

This urgent appeal, so well calculated to act upon a scrupulous and at bottom timorous conscience, such as that of Theodosius, was, as

can easily be seen, based upon certain fundamental principles.

St. Ambrose reproaches the Emperor for not having asked for a report from the bishop and for having condemned him unheard. The observation is just. It is clear that Theodosius, as was customary with him, had acted precipitately, without being in possession of all that was required to come to a decision.

But St. Ambrose hardly dwells on the legal aspect of the affair. From the start he urges considerations of a general order. He reminds the Emperor of similar occurrences, in which the Jews had been guilty without any one being seriously affected. And above all he shows the unpopular character of a measure which meant nothing less than to compel a bishop to rebuild a synagogue with the money of Christians, and gravely to humiliate the Catholics before the Jews. "It was neither a special pleading in favour of the bishop," remarks the Duc de Broglie,⁹⁰ "nor an appeal to a more enlightened judge, still less a request for a favour: it was a formal protest, based on a principle of absolute doctrine. Whether guilty or not of the excess of zeal which was laid to

⁹⁰ *Saint Ambroise*, 3rd ed. (1899), p. 137.

his charge, a bishop could not, under any circumstances or for any cause, be compelled to contribute to the building of an edifice in which the Christian faith might be denied or attacked." The animosity felt by St. Ambrose against the Jews⁹¹ must have contributed to make him esteem the act exacted by the Emperor as still more ignominious. He therefore has no fear in stating as a fact that the affair at Callinicum had nothing to do with the State, but concerned the Church and God (*causa Dei*), and that no considerations of public order should take precedence over the interests of religion. *Cedat oportet censura religioni.*⁹²

Vehement as was the demand of St. Ambrose, it remained for some time ineffective. The Emperor did not conceive it to be his duty to allow the guilty to go unpunished. St. Ambrose then decided to carry out the threat which he had unobtrusively insinuated at the end of his letter . . . "*ut me magis audires in*

⁹¹ For example, see *Expositio Evang. Lucae*, iv, 54 (Schenkl's ed., Part IV, p. 166): "*Nam et Iudaei ex patre diabolo non atique canis successione, sed criminis, etc.*" *Ibid.*, viii, 64 (Schenkl, Part IV, p. 423) on their inexcusable blindness; *De Interpellatione Iob et David*, I, v, 13 (Schenkl, Part II, p. 218), etc.

⁹² § 11.

regia, ne, si necesse esset, audires in Ecclesia." He has himself related the scene, and the vicissitudes of the culminating episode in this contest, in a letter to his sister.⁹³ He pressed his point from his pulpit at Milan. He chose as his text this passage from Jeremias: "Take thee a rod of walnut," and in his customary manner of allegorical exegesis showed that the rod was the emblem of the prophet's function, of threatening and chastising. He recalled the warnings of St. Paul to the Corinthians and the imperative necessity of healing the sinner by means of severity. He explained the wonderful method of the Redemption, and how the mercy of Jesus Christ was exercised only for the benefit of the merciful. In very clear terms he then excluded the Jews from the mystical privileges reserved for the true children of God. He thundered forth the reproaches uttered by Nathan to David, gave a long list of the many blessings that had been despised, and, addressing the Emperor directly in order to ensure that this string of allusions was quite clearly understood by him, he enumerated the debt of gratitude he [the Emperor] had contracted towards Heaven, and invited him to

⁹³ *Ep.*, xli (*P. L.*, xvi, 1160).

“protect the Body of Christ” in order that Christ Himself might protect the Emperor’s realm.

“As soon as I had come down from the pulpit, the Emperor said to me: ‘Is it of me that you have been speaking?’ I replied: ‘I said what I thought to be my duty in order to help you.’ ‘Yes,’ he replied, ‘the order I gave to have the synagogue restored by the bishop was too harsh, but I have softened it. The monks are too forward!’ Then Timasius, Master of Horse and Infantry, started abusing the monks. I retorted: ‘I am dealing with the Emperor, as is my duty. For I know that he fears God. With you, who are using such violent language, I shall have to use some other method.’

“I remained standing some little time, and then said to the Emperor: ‘Act in such wise that I can offer the Holy Sacrifice for you in full assurance. Lift the weight off my soul.’ The Emperor, who was seated, made a gesture of agreement, but without any formal promise. I remained planted in front of him. He told me he would amend his rescript. I asked him to issue his commands on the matter at once, lest he give occasion to the *Comes* to harm the Christians. He promised me that this should be done. ‘Have I your word?’ I asked; ‘Have I your word?’ I insisted. ‘I give it.’ Then I went up to the

altar, which I should not have approached had he not made me a positive promise. And in truth, the grace flowing from the Sacrifice was so great that I felt the value which God attached to my success, and that He had aided me with His divine assistance. All has therefore come to pass as I could have wished."

St. Ambrose had won, but his victory was not one of those which do honour to him and make him loved. All the principles he laid down and the arguments he marshalled break down before this simple fact, that he refused to the victims of public fanaticism the legitimate amends to which, as acknowledged by the imperial power, they had a right. The most convinced apologists of St. Ambrose find it not a little difficult to exonerate him from blame in this case. Msgr. Baunard⁹⁴ confesses that "the conduct of Ambrose may be regarded from very different points of view." He allows that "if we take our stand, as Theodosius did, upon the point of view of public order, we can understand how the Emperor, reasoning before all else as an administrator, imposed on the Christians the obligation to make amends

⁹⁴ *Histoire de Saint Ambroise*, 2nd ed. (1872), p. 412.

for the wrong they had committed by methods which were in point of fact illegal." But, on the other hand, he adds, "in the eyes of Ambrose error had no rights," and asks whether, "when paganism was still exhibiting its monstrosities, and at a time when the ashes from the piled faggots on which but yesterday the faithful had mounted were barely cold, the Christian religion, proclaimed as the religion of the State, was not authorised to treat error as an enemy. . . ." These are excuses of small value. Certainly, Theodosius might have proceeded with more *sang-froid* and self-restraint. Why inflict on the bishop so mortifying a penalty, since his responsibility was not clearly established? It would have been enough to make the town pay the cost and to punish the real culprits severely. But the immunity which was meted out to them *en bloc* was unjustifiable and could have no other result than to increase similar violent acts.

Five years later, on the 29th of September, 393,⁹⁵ Theodosius found himself obliged to re-establish by decree the fact that the Jews did not form a proscribed sect, and that no one had the right to prevent their meetings, or to

⁹⁵ *Cod. Theod.*, XVI, viii, 9.

rob or destroy their synagogues. Repressive measures, firmly carried out at the time of the occurrence at Callinicum, would have discouraged beforehand the fomenters of disorder. Emboldened by official *inertia* they imagined that anything was permissible.

THE MASSACRE OF THESSALONICA AND THE PENANCE OF THEODOSIUS

Thessalonica (Salonica) in the IVth century was the most important city in Macedonia and one of the most flourishing commercial centres in the Empire.⁹⁶ The governor of Macedonia had his residence there, and the Emperors, Theodosius in particular,⁹⁷ made a stay there on several occasions.

An insignificant incident was the prelude to the hideous massacre of 390. Botheric, the governor of the town, had put in prison, for an offence against morals, a charioteer who was very popular with the frequenters of the circus. As the games were shortly to take place,

⁹⁶ Cfr. Marquard, *L'Organisation de l'Empire Romain*, 11, 203.

⁹⁷ He passed there the first six months of the year 380, and we find him there again at the beginning of 388. Cfr. Rauschen, *Jahrbücher der Christlichen Kirche*, pp. 61-62 and 280.

the crowd clamoured for their favourite champion. On being met with a refusal, a riot broke out, and Botheric and a certain number of other officials were slain.

Theodosius was at Milan when the report of these events reached him. He broke out into one of those fits of rage to which he was subject;⁹⁸ these completely clouded his judgment for a time, but did not last long. St. Ambrose sought in vain to interpose and soften him, but acting on the counsel of his *entourage*, Theodosius determined upon exemplary reprisals. He sent an atrocious order, which indeed he did his best to revoke shortly afterwards, but it was then too late. The population of Thessalonica was assembled in the circus for a show. On a given signal soldiers invaded the circus, and for the space of three hours indiscriminately massacred men, women and children. The victims numbered several thousand.⁹⁹

When the disastrous news became known in Milan, a synod was sitting to deliberate on the course to be pursued with regard to the

⁹⁸ Cfr. Chrysostom, *Homil.*, xxi, 4; Ambrose, *Ep.* li, 4; Aurelius Victor, *Epitome*, xlviii, 13.

⁹⁹ 7000, if we are to believe Theodoret.

partisans of Itacius, one of the bishops who had done most to secure the condemnation to death of Priscillian. The unanimous opinion was that a public expiation must be exacted from the Emperor. St. Ambrose felt that the influence he was known to possess would render public opinion very severe against him if he did not obtain some striking reparation. The question was to bring the Emperor to accept this view. In the case of homicide, ecclesiastical discipline at that time imposed a penance lasting several years.¹ Even admitting the principle of an appreciable mitigation,—for Theodosius, not having done more than commit a cruel abuse of his *legal* power, could not be considered purely and simply as a murderer,—he must be made to understand that, excluded from the Church by his crime, he would have to give tokens of a sincere repentance in order to obtain reinstatement.

Theodosius was absent from Milan at the

¹ The Vth canon of the Council of Elvira (about 300), laid down seven years in the case of voluntary homicide (cfr. *Hist. des Conciles*, the French translation of Hefele, by a Benedictine of Farnborough Abbey, Paris, 1907, Vol. I, Part 1, p. 224); the 22nd canon of the Council of Ancyra (314) imposed a life penance (*ibid.* p. 324). St. Basil, 3rd Canonical *Epistle*, Canon 56, required twenty years; ten years in the case of a mortal blow, Canon 57.

time and hastened to return. St. Ambrose preferred to avoid a painful interview. Suffering from a severe indisposition, he left the city, and from a distance addressed to the Emperor the following confidential letter:²

“The memory of our old friendship is sweet to me, and I treasure my gratitude for the good deeds which your great benevolence has so often extended to others at my intercession. You must understand then that if I have felt obliged to absent myself on your return, which up till now I had so eagerly desired, this could not be due to any feeling of ingratitude. At your court I saw that I was the only one debarred from the natural right to hear, in order that at the same time they might balk me of my duty to speak. It has often happened to you, in fact, to be annoyed that certain measures that had been resolved upon in your council had come to my ears. I, therefore, am shut out from a right which is common to all, in spite of the words of the Lord: ‘For there is not anything secret, that shall not be made manifest.’ (Luke viii, 17).

“I have complied with the imperial will as unreservedly as was in my power. I have been careful to give you no cause for displeasure. I have so acted that no one communicated to me any of the imperial

² *Ep.*, li (*P. L.* xvi, 1209).

decrees. Had I been present, it would therefore have been necessary for me either to hear nothing (since all kept silence from fear), and thereby run the risk of being considered as a man who intended not to see anything, or else hear something, but in such wise that, though my ears were open, my voice at least must remain mute. For I must not repeat what I hear for fear of imperilling those who might become suspected of indiscretion.

“Which alternative then was I to take? To hear nothing? But in order to bring that about I cannot possibly stuff my ears with wax, as is related in the fables of old. Should I repeat what has been told me? But the stern nature of your orders compelled me to watch over my words in order to provoke no shedding of blood. Must I then keep silence? Would it not be most pitiful to put my conscience in chains and to impose silence on my voice? What of that which was written: ‘If the prophet declare it not to the wicked man, the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, and the prophet shall suffer punishment for not having declared unto him his sin?’ [a paraphrase of Ezech. iii, 18].

“Let me declare unto you, August Emperor, that I cannot deny that you have zeal for the faith; that you have the fear of God I do not gainsay. But there is in you an impetuosity natural to you, which soon turns to mercy when one seeks to soften it down,—which becomes exasperated and well-

nigh uncontrollable when it is irritated. If there be no one to moderate it, pray God, at any rate, there be no one to spur it on! I leave you willingly to yourself, for you soon recover of your own accord, and the strength of your piety then triumphs over the violence of your nature.

"I preferred to leave this violence to your own meditation without saying a word, rather than risk irritating you by taking some open step. I liked better to relax something of my duty than to be wanting in humility, and even though the other bishops might reproach me for divesting myself of my authority, I was anxious not to fail in the respect I owe you,—you whom I love so much. Overcoming the first motion of your will, you will have time to come to a decision. I alleged indisposition, which was in fact very serious, and that a warmer³ climate might have the effect of soothing my pain. I would, however, rather have died than not have waited two or three days for your arrival; but it was not possible for me to do so.

"A massacre has taken place at Thessalonica, which has never been equalled within the memory of man,—a massacre which I was unable to prevent, but the full atrocity of which I had already pointed out to you with a thousand supplications. You, too, by revoking your orders—too late—fully per-

³ I accept Van Ortrov's conjecture of *auris* (*Ambrosiana*, p. 26). The MSS. have *viris*, which is unintelligible.

ceived its enormity. I could not extenuate such a crime. The first news of it became known as the synod assembled on the arrival of the bishops from Gaul. There was not one who did not bewail it, not one who did not receive it with keen emotion. Even if I, Ambrose, were to have allowed you to remain in my communion, it would not have absolved your act at all. The public resentment, which is already attacking any such proposition, would break out still more violently against me, if no one were to state clearly that it is indispensable for you to reconcile yourself with God.

“Do you not feel ashamed, O Emperor, to have acted as did David, the Royal Prophet, the ancestor of the lineage of Christ according to the flesh? Nathan said to him: ‘A rich man, who possessed many flocks, took away from a poor man his one ewe-lamb to make a feast for a guest, and killed it for him.’ And David perceiving that it was against himself that the shaft had been aimed, cried out: ‘I have sinned against the Lord’ (2 Kings xii, 13). Suffer then, without impatience, to be told, O Emperor, that you have done what the prophet reproached King David for. If you listen to my words with submission, and say with him: ‘I have sinned against the Lord’; if you repeat these words of the Royal Prophet, ‘Come, let us adore and fall down and weep before the Lord that made us’ (Ps. XCIV, 6), to you also shall it be said, ‘Since thou repentest,

the Lord also hath taken away thy sin: thou shalt not die.' (2 Kings xii, 13).

"Holy Job, who also was a mighty man in the world, said: 'I have not concealed my sin: I have confessed before all the people.' Jonathan, the son of Saul, said to that wrathful king: 'Sin not, O King, against thy servant, David' (1 Kings xix, 4), and again: 'Why therefore, wilt thou sin against innocent blood by killing David, who is without fault?' (1 Kings, xix, 5). King though he was, he would not have sinned the less by killing one who was innocent. David, too, after he was in possession of his kingdom, when he learnt that the innocent Abner had been killed by Joab, the chief of his army, cried out: 'I and my kingdom are innocent before the Lord for ever of the blood of Abner, the son of Ner' (2 Kings iii, 28). And he fasted with weeping.

"If I write all this to you, it is not to humiliate you, but in order that the example of these kings may lead you to lift this sin from your reign, and you will only take it away by humiliating your soul before God. You are a man: temptation lays seige to you,—triumph over it! Sin is only obliterated by tears and penance. Neither angel nor archangel can supply their place. The Lord Himself, who alone has the right to say, 'I am with you' (Matth. xxviii, 20), will pardon you only after you have done penance.

"I am now, therefore, going to warn you, to beg

you, to exhort you, to recall you to your duty. For I suffer at seeing that you (who up to now have been a model of exceptional virtue, whose clemency rose to such a high pitch that you found it hard to consent to the punishment of the guilty, do not at all regret the murder of so many innocent people. Whatever may have been the good fortune you have had in war, whatever the praise you have deserved in all things, it was your piety which has always conspicuously characterized your actions. The devil has been envious of your most outstanding merit. Overcome him while you still have the means. Do not add another sin by taking up an attitude which has already been so hurtful to others before you.

“As for me, who in all else remain indebted to your piety,—for which I cannot be ungrateful and which I hold to be superior to that of many emperors, and as being equalled only by one,—I say, I have no cause to be intractable as regards you, but I have some reason to be apprehensive. I do not dare to offer the Sacrifice if you decide to be present. Can that which is not permissible when the blood of one man has been shed, be lawful when it is the blood of so great a number? I trow not.

“Therefore I am writing you with my own hand this letter, which you alone should read. As truly as I aspire to be delivered by the Lord from my tribulations, so it is not at the bidding, nor by the

intermediary of any man, but by a clear revelation that this interdict has been placed on me. I was very anxious during the night when I was making preparations to leave, and it seemed that you came to the church, but I was forbidden to offer the Sacrifice. I pass over other painful experiences which I was able to put aside. I suppose I suffered them for love of you. May God grant that all this may end peaceably! He warns us in many ways, by signs from Heaven, by the precepts of the prophets, by the visions of sinners, whereof He wills to make use in order to make us understand that we must pray to Him that He may keep trouble far from us, and preserve peace for princes, and maintain in the Church, which has so great a need of Christian and pious emperors, her faith and tranquillity.

“You undoubtedly desire the approval of Heaven. It is written: ‘All things have their seasons’ (Eccles. iii, 1) and: ‘It is time, O Lord, to do’ (Ps. cxviii, 126), and ‘Now is the accepted time.’ You will make your oblation when you shall have been authorized to offer sacrifice and your victim will be received favourably by God. Would it not be a joy to me to earn the good graces of the Emperor by conforming to your wishes if the present matter permitted? Even now prayer makes sacrifice. It can obtain pardon, while the oblation would only be to offend God: the one implies humility, the other would only be contempt. God Himself has laid down

that He prefers us to practise His commandments rather than to offer sacrifice. . . . How should those who condemn their own sins not be better Christians than those who try to justify them? . . .

“Would to God, O Emperor, that I had trusted to myself rather than to your customary manner of acting! I knew how quick you were to pardon, how quick to revoke your commands,—you have acted thus so many times! And now others have been beforehand with you, and I was unable to avert a sudden act which I had no reason to foresee. But let us give thanks to God, who wills to chastise His servants in order not to let them perish. *My* task is like that of the prophets; *yours* will be like that of the saints.

“Is not the father of Gratian dearer to me than my own eyes? The other sacred pledges of your affection are my debtors for your forgiveness. I use this tender word to designate those whom I join with you in my love. I love you, I cherish you, my prayers go out for you. If you have trust in me, do as I say; if you trust me, recognize the truth of what I am doing in putting God above everything. May you, August Emperor, you and your revered children, enjoy perpetual peace, and be happy and flourishing in all things.”

Under all these manifestations of tenderness and devotion the intention of St. Am-

brose comes out with unequivocal clearness. He establishes the fact that the Emperor was still feeling only a very moderate repentance for his sin, and while he strives to make him understand its gravity, he warns him that, as a bishop, it is impossible for him to offer the Holy Sacrifice in the presence of a sinner who has cut himself off from communion with the Church.

Confronted with this respectful summons, what was the attitude of Theodosius? That he came to repent admits of no doubt. But on certain details of this historic penance modern criticism raises difficulties which deserve serious examination.⁴

It is incontestable that of all the historians

⁴ See Förster, *Ambrosius, Bischof von Mailand*, pp. 64 sqq. (Halle, 1884); Rauschen, *Jahrbücher der Christlichen Kirche*, pp. 320 sqq.; Van Ortro, *Les Vies Grecques de Saint Ambroise et leurs Sources*, in *Ambrosiana* (Milan, 1897), also in *Analecta Bollandiana*, Vol. XXIII (1904), pp. 418 sqq.; Duc de Broglie, *Les Pères Bollandistes et la Pénitence de Théodose* in *Le Correspondant* of the 25th August, 1900, pp. 644 sqq.; *Arch. für Katholisches Kirchenrecht*, Vol. LXXXVI (1906), p. 168-172 (a translation from the *Scuola Cattolica*, no. 284, 1905); Hugo Koch, *Die Kirchenbusse des Kaisers Theodosius d. Gr. in Geschichte und Legende*, in the *Historisches Jahrbuch*, Vol. XXVIII (1907), 2nd part, pp. 257-277; Chrys. Baur in the *Theol. Quartalschrift* (1908), pp. 401-9.

who have narrated the facts,⁵ Theodoret has exercised the greatest influence on subsequent tradition. The following are the essential passages in his narrative.

“On returning to Milan the Emperor wished to enter the church as usual. But Ambrose went to meet him outside the vestibule, and forbade him to set foot within the sacred precincts. The Bishop then delivered a solemn and grandiloquent discourse, with a view to compel Theodosius to acknowledge the enormity of his sin. I quote the conclusion:—

“ ‘ . . . With what eyes do you behold the Temple of the Lord of us all? What are those feet which would tread this sacred soil? How can you lift up your hands still dripping with unjustly shed blood? How can you receive into those hands the most holy Body of the Lord? How can you carry to your lips His Blood after having poured forth so much blood unjustly in anger? Away then! Do not seek to add a second crime to the first! Bend your

⁵ Namely, Rufinus, *Hist. Eccl.*, ii, 18 (written 402-3); *P. L.*, xi, 526; St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, v, 26 (413-426); Paulinus, *Vita S. Ambrosii*, ch. xxiv (circa 422); Sozomen, vii, 25 (between 443-450), *P. G.*, lxvii, 1493; Theodoret, v, 17 (circa 450), *P. G.*, lxxxii, 1232.

neck beneath the yoke which from on high the Lord of all things approves. *He* will make you whole and bring you back to good health.' ”

“Yielding to these words,” Theodoret adds, “for the fact that he had been brought up on Holy Scripture helped him to discern clearly the duty owed by bishops and by kings,—the Emperor returned to his palace with lamentation and tears.”

Eight months passed in this way. But with the approach of Christmas the Emperor felt an additional access of grief and remorse. Rufinus, the Master of Ceremonies, suggested to him to endeavour to make some accommodation with St. Ambrose in order to try and make him unbend. After a dispirited refusal, Theodosius consented to let him go. But Ambrose received the courtier with the most contemptuous words, and when he announced that the Emperor was following close on his heels, he replied that, were it at the peril of his life, he would still forbid Theodosius to enter the church. The Emperor arrived shortly after, with no words of menace, but imploring his forgiveness, and ready to accept the penance which the bishop should think right to impose. Ambrose requested him to promulgate a law

to the effect that every sentence of confiscation or death should only become operative thirty days after it had been re-examined and confirmed. Theodosius obeyed immediately, and Ambrose lifted the excommunication which he had pronounced against him. "Whereat the most faithful Emperor ventured to enter the temple of God. Not standing upright, nor even on his knees did he make his prayer to the Lord, but prostrate on the ground, he repeated the words of David: 'My soul hath stuck fast in the mire. Restore me my life, according to thy word.' And he tore his hair with his hands, and struck his brow; he watered the pavement with his tears and asked to be pardoned."

He had not, however, come to the end of his humiliations. Theodoret relates that when the Emperor came forward to receive Holy Communion within the rails nearest to the altar, St. Ambrose signified to him through a deacon that this spot was reserved for the priests, that he must withdraw. Theodosius obeyed, alleging in excuse that the customs were different at Constantinople.

Such is, in short, Theodoret's narrative. It has imposed itself upon posterity by its drama-

tic quality. Cassiodorus inserted it in his *Historia Ecclesiastica Tripartita*,⁶ which became the accepted manual of history in the Middle Ages. It likewise appears in the Greek Menologies,⁷ and in the Byzantine chroniclers.⁸ Many allusions to it are to be found in pictures consecrated to the glory of our saint.⁹ Even to-day an old column in Milan marks the traditional spot of the encounter between the Bishop and the Emperor.

Historians of some repute have accepted the essential details of this account.¹⁰ The Duc de Broglie¹¹ has not hesitated to vouch for them. Nevertheless, we feel some scepticism when we examine them closely and compare them with other evidence.

It cannot be denied that Theodoret has allowed certain gross blunders to creep into his

⁶ ix, 30, *P. L.*, lxi, 1145.

⁷ Cf. *Ambrosiana*, pp. 11 sqq. (Milan, 1897).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 37, note.

⁹ For instance, the picture entitled, *Il Gonfalone di Sant' Ambrogio*, in the *Museo Civico* at Milan. Romutti (*Sant' Ambrogio*, p. 28) gives a reproduction of it (Milan, 1897).

¹⁰ Cfr. Baunard, *Histoire de Saint Ambroise* (2nd ed., 1872), pp. 449 sqq.; Thamin, *Saint Ambroise et la Morale Chrétienne au iv^e Siècle*, p. 32 (Paris, 1895); Allmang in the *Theologische Revue*, 1902, p. 460.

¹¹ Article in the *Correspondant*, quoted above.

narrative. Thus he attaches directly to his account of the penance of Theodosius the episode which shows the Emperor being cast out from the place reserved for clerics. Sozomen had already mentioned it before him, but without referring it to this period.¹² Theodoret emphasizes it by inserting it at the end of the drama he had just unfolded. But what likelihood is there that Theodosius at the end of the year 390 was ignorant of the custom of the church at Milan, where he had already attended services on many occasions? ¹³ The law, too, which Theodoret says was promulgated at the bidding of Ambrose, is found in the Theodosian Codex; ¹⁴ but it is placed therein

¹² *H. E.*, vii, 25 (*P. G.*, lxxvii, 1496).

¹³ We find him at Milan during the first months of the year 389 (cfr. Rauschen, *op. cit.*, p. 298), and nearly the whole of the year 390 (*ibid.*, p. 316).

¹⁴ Here is the text (Mommsen, Vol. I, pars posterior, p. 503; Berlin, 1905):

Imppp. Gratianus, Valentinianus et Theodosius AAA. Flaviano P. P. Illyrici et Italiae.

Si vindicari in aliquos severius contra nostram consuetudinem pro causae intuitu iusserimus, nolumus statim eos aut subire poenam aut excipere sententiam, sed per dies XXX super statu eorum sors et fortuna suspensa sit. Reos sane accipiat vinciatque custodia et excubiis solertibus vigilanter observet.

Dat. XV kal. sept. Veronae, Antonio et Syagrio consulibus.

under the year 382, and not under 390 or 391. We must then, if we are to retain at all costs the incident mentioned by Theodoret, either suppose that a formal error had slipped into the Codex,¹⁵ or admit that this law had fallen into desuetude and had been revived after the events at Thessalonica.¹⁶ But is it not strange that no mention of its revival is found in the Codex? Was it a legislative act of no importance in the eyes of the penitent Emperor? Our difficulty is increased when we find that Theodoret attributes to the beneficent action of this law the delay in the vengeance which the Emperor wished to exact from Antioch at the time of the rebellion in that city. Now this rebellion, in spite of Theodoret's opinion which gives it as *after* the massacre of Thessalonica, took place in 387.¹⁷ But in that case we must choose one of two alternatives:—either the law played no part in the Antioch affair—and we thus once more surprise Theo-

¹⁵ This is Mommsen's opinion (*ibid.*, p. 346). He thinks the date of the law should be given as 391.

¹⁶ This hypothesis, advanced by Tillemont, *Memoires*, Vol. X, p. 221, is accepted by Baunard, *op. cit.*, p. 455, note; Rauschen, *op. cit.*, p. 322; and de Broglie, article quoted above, p. 660.

¹⁷ Cfr. Rauschen, *op. cit.*, p. 512.

doret in a flagrant inaccuracy,—or it did, and is therefore anterior to the year 390.

To a certain extent we may excuse him if we take note that it was not he who first spoke of this law, but Rufinus¹⁸ and Sozomen,¹⁹ who connected it with the penance of Theodosius. At least he need not, from a taste for melodrama and a thirst for the romantic, have associated irreconcilable incidents, wherein the reader ends by losing himself.²⁰

These inconsistencies only put us on our guard against Theodoret's critical sense and information. If we now consider the most characteristic incident—St. Ambrose halting Theodosius under the portico of the basilica—we find that the Saint makes no allusion to it in his correspondence, which is so full of circumstantial details. The same omission is to be observed in the funeral oration in honour of Theodosius which he delivered in the presence of Honorius. While lauding the wonderful penance of the dead Emperor, he nowhere says that he [the Emperor] showed any hesitation,

¹⁸ *H. E.*, ii, 18; *P. L.*, xxi, 526.

¹⁹ *H. E.*, vii, 25.

²⁰ Other examples of the same annoying tendency in this historian are noted in the *Analecta Bollandiana*, xxiii, p. 419 (1904).

or that he required a prolonged effort to overcome himself.

“Humility, which delivers those threatened by dangers and lifts up those who have fallen, is a precious virtue. He possessed it in its fulness who said, ‘It is I, Lord, I am he that have sinned, I, the shepherd who have done wickedly; what have these done who are but the sheep of my flock? Let thy hand be turned against me’ (2 Kings xxiv, 17). Well might he repeat these words, who had submitted his Empire to God, had done penance, confessed his sin and asked for pardon; it was to his humility that he owed his salvation. Our Lord Jesus Christ humiliated Himself in order to raise up mankind; he [Theodosius], following the example of the Saviour, practised humility and enjoys the peace promised by Jesus Christ.”²¹ Further on: “Casting far away from him the intrigues besetting royalty, he bewailed publicly in the church the sin into which the deceits of others had made him fall, he asked for pardon with groanings and tears. This public penance, which mere ordinary citizens shrink from, he, the Emperor, did not blush to perform. And from that moment there was not a day when he did not feel the sting of the pain thereof.”²²

²¹ § 27 (*P. L.*, xvi, 1457).

²² § 34 (*P. L.*, xvi, 1396).

St. Augustine, the friend and disciple of St. Ambrose, gives admirable testimony to the voluntary self-abasement of Theodosius, but breathes no word of the alleged solemn interview between the Bishop and the Emperor. It is only through misunderstanding it that his testimony can be taken as corroborating that of Theodoret.²³ Rufinus (who is very brief, it is true) observes the same discretion.

We must, therefore, ask ourselves if this grandiose *mise-en-scène* was not invented by Theodoret, who, with all the resources of his imagination and rhetoric, may have enlarged upon a brief indication given by Sozomen.²⁴ Sceptical critics observe that the legend might well have originated in a too literal interpretation of the account given by Paulinus, the biographer of St. Ambrose, who in all probability did no more than freely paraphrase Letter 51. This is the extract:²⁵

²³ *De Civit. Dei*, v, 26. The Duc de Broglie, in the *Correspondant* of August 25, 1900, p. 661, translates Augustine's words, "*Ecclesiastica coercitus disciplina sic egit penitentiam ut,*" etc., by "*Il trouve une justice sainte, qui l'arrête au seuil de l'Eglise,*" etc. (*sic*).

²⁴ vii, 25 (*P. G.*, lxxvii, 1493).

²⁵ *Vita S. Ambrosii*, § 24.

“At about that time the proceedings at Thessalonica inflicted a deep sorrow upon the Bishop, when he learnt that the city had been almost annihilated. The Emperor had in reality promised him that he would pardon the citizens of that city. But owing to the secret intrigues of the *Comites* round the Emperor, the city was given over to the sword for the space of three hours, without the knowledge of the Bishop, and a very large number of innocent people were put to death. On hearing of this, the Bishop refused the Emperor permission to enter the church (*copiam imperatori ingrediendi ecclesiam denegavit*, § 24), and adjudged him to be unworthy of participating in the services of the church, and in the Sacraments, until he had done public penance. The Emperor objected that David had committed adultery, and added homicide to this crime. But Ambrose answered him at once: ‘Since you have imitated him in his sin, imitate him also in his return to a right state.’ At these words the Most Clement Emperor decided no longer to flinch from public penance. . . .”

Possibly we should not be wrong in seeing in this report some reminiscence of the penance of the Emperor Philip and the humiliation inflicted on him by Bishop Babylas, as related by Eusebius (vi, 34).

"It is related that Philip, who was a Christian, wished to be present with the people at the prayers which were being held in the church on Easter eve, but the Bishop did not allow him to enter before he had confessed and done penance with the sinners. Otherwise he could not have been admitted on account of the multitude of his crimes. It is added that the Emperor submitted willingly, showing by this action that he was filled with the fear of God."²⁶

However it may be—for I admit the existence of some uncertainty—the renown of St. Ambrose does not depend in any degree upon one or the other of the solutions with which we are confronted. "If Ambrose's confidential letter," Fr. van Ortroy²⁷ remarks, "was sufficient to bring to repentance Theodosius, who was very well disposed, since he had despatched to the magistrates of the guilty city a counter-order which unhappily did not arrive in time, the moral prestige of the Bishop comes out indisputably greater, and the memory of the monarch emerges nobler and purer from the incident." We must agree, however, that in the story as told by Theodoret—this solemn en-

²⁶ St. John Chrysostom, *De S. Babyla contra Iulianum et Gentiles*, § 6.

²⁷ *Anal. Boll.*, xxiii, p. 419 (1904).

counter between the priesthood and the empire for the vindication of a principle in the purely moral order—there is a touching majesty that one would not wish to sacrifice at any price if one did not place historical truth above every other consideration.

THE LAST DAYS OF VALENTINIAN II AND THEODOSIUS

When quitting Italy for Constantinople, in the spring of 391, Theodosius left the West in the hands of Valentinian II, then nineteen years old. He took away with him a feeling of confidence in having left with the young prince Arbogast, the Frank, whose courage he had found occasion to test in his struggles against Maximus and his son Victor. But, contrary to his expectations, the greatest difficulties of Valentinian arose precisely from him. The young Emperor was not long in seeing that Arbogast controlled the entire army in his capacity of *magister militum*, and that even the civil officials were subject to his influence. A conflict was inevitable, and it was not long in coming to a head. Extremely painful scenes revealed to Valentinian that his power was only nominal, and that in reality it was exercised

by Arbogast in his name. The violence of his desperation began to disturb the partisans of Arbogast. Feeling that his very life was in danger, Valentinian appealed to Theodosius, and then turned to St. Ambrose, whom he implored to come and join him. St. Ambrose started out at once. He was crossing the Alps when he received news of the death of Valentinian.²⁸

Soon after, Arbogast conferred the imperial dignity on a former rhetorician, Eugenius by name, who had become *magister scriniorum*, or head of one of the imperial government offices.

St. Ambrose had suffered much from Valentinian some years earlier. But he well knew that at that time he was dominated by his mother, Justina, and had had little responsibility for the acts which had been done under his name. After the death of Justina,²⁹ his character had become strengthened; every one

²⁸ The report was spread that he had committed suicide. It is, however, hardly doubtful that he was assassinated, and that the blow came from some one in the *entourage* of Arbogast. Was the latter directly instrumental? This cannot be affirmed with certainty. Cfr. Rauschen, *Jahrbücher der Christlichen Kirche*, p. 363.

²⁹ In 388.

praised his courage, his justice, his chastity,³⁰ and his heroic renunciation of the amusements he was most fond of, such as the circus and the chase.³¹ The feelings of Valentinian towards St. Ambrose had changed very much; he had at last come to recognize the loyalty of the Bishop; it was to him that his thoughts turned in the anguish of his last days, and he had passionately desired to receive Baptism at his hands. St. Ambrose's sorrow was therefore deep and sincere.

"In face of the premature death of the august Emperor Valentinian," he wrote to Theodosius, "I confess that I feel bitter anguish. I remember that he was brought up in your faith, and formed under your precepts, that he cherished a tender piety towards God, and a lively affection for me, whom he had formerly persecuted. He once hated me as an enemy; since then he has held me in the light of a father. I mention this, not with a view to recall the injustices I once suffered, but to give testimony to the change which took place in him. His hatred was infused into him by others, but his affection came from himself,

³⁰ Cf. *De Obitu Valent.*, § 17 (*P. L.*, xvi, 1424).

³¹ *Ibid.*, § 15.

and so deep into his heart did you make it penetrate that he forgot all the bad counsels of his mother. He told me that it was I who had taught him; he sought for me as an expectant brother, and when some persons had falsely announced my arrival, he waited impatiently for me. Nay more; during these sad days, which have plunged us into so great mourning, he wished to write to me to initiate him into the Sacrament of Baptism, although there were eminent bishops in Gaul—a somewhat unreasonable proposal, it is true, but one which showed his affection and the good feeling he had towards me.³² How then can I fail to mourn him from the bottom of my heart, and in what is deepest in my soul, in my thoughts? . . .”

The honour of delivering the funeral oration naturally fell to St. Ambrose. The body was borne first to Vienne and then to Milan.

³² From the beginning of the IVth century it became the custom to put off Baptism as long as possible, with a view to benefit by the amnesty it conferred; cfr. *Rev. d'Hist. et de Litt. Relig.*, page 20, note (1901) and Grützmacher's *Hieronymus*, Vol. I, p. 108 (1901). Chapters 51–53 of the *De Obitu Valentiniani* are important in connection with the doctrine of “baptism by desire.”

They waited two months for Theodosius, and the ceremony did not take place before the end of July or the beginning of August, 392. The *De Obitu Valentiniani Consolatio*, written out in accordance with the substance of the oration delivered, gives us some idea of the tact with which St. Ambrose acquitted himself in a particularly delicate situation. It was not possible for him to dissimulate his indignation and his grief, or to brand the revolution by which Eugenius had just profited, or to indicate too clearly those on whom the suspicion of the murder rested. He covered over a few brief allusions, understood by every one, with a moving lament on the misfortunes of Valentinian.

“There is no need to ask you to weep,” he said to his hearers.³³ “All mourn alike, strong men and weak, even the unwilling barbarians, and those who had passed for his enemies. With what lamentations did the people surround the funeral cortège all the way here from Gaul! Their tears flowed for him, I will not say as their Emperor, but as their father—an intimate sorrow, as though each one felt the death of some one near and dear to him. It is be-

³³ *P. L.*, xvi, 1418.

cause we have lost an Emperor who possessed two qualities well deserving of our sorrowing regret—youth in its first flower, and a rare maturity of judgment. This is why I weep, and as the prophet says, ‘Therefore do I weep, and my eyes run down with water, because the comforter, the relief of my soul, is far from me’ (Lament. i, 16). . . . O excellent youth, would to God I might have reached you still alive, and that a short respite might have permitted me to see you again! I would not presume on my courage, my skill, my prudence, but with what care, what eagerness would I have restored concord and friendship between you and your *Comes*! ³⁴ . . . And if he had been inflexible, I would have remained with you; for at least I was sure beforehand of a hearing from you, even if others refused to listen to me when I was speaking on your behalf.

“O Gratian, O Valentinian, so fair, so dear, how short were your lives! How soon death came to seek you! How close on each other your tombs! I love to repeat your names, Gratian, Valentinian, to take solace in your memory. Gratian, Valentinian, so fair, so dear, inseparable in life, death has no power to sepa-

³⁴ Arbogast.

rate you! The same tomb will again unite those who were linked together by affection. Equal in virtue, equal in piety, you were swifter than the eagle, gentler than the lamb. . . . Lord, since none may ask for another more than he would wish for himself, separate me not after my death from those I have so greatly loved during life; I have had the joy of their society so little here below; may it be granted to me to be united for ever with them up above!"

It is a significant fact that Eugenius had hardly become Emperor when he sent St. Ambrose two letters, one after the other, in an attempt to win his sympathy,³⁵ so greatly did he appreciate the importance of the support which the Bishop had it in his power to give. But St. Ambrose, while preserving the most respectful attitude towards the new ruler,³⁶ refused his advances. The equivocal conduct of Eugenius as between Christianity and paganism, the favours with which he loaded the latter, and his evident indifference towards the

³⁵ Cf. *Ep.*, lvii, 11 (*P. L.*, xvi, 1228).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, § 12. Eugenius was a Christian; *ibid.*, § 8: "*Quomodo offeres dona tua Christo.*"

religion to which he belonged,³⁷ imposed upon St. Ambrose the greatest reserve. Moreover, he could not help feeling some resentment over the circumstances in which Eugenius had seized the supreme power.

When Eugenius arrived in Italy, St. Ambrose left Milan and went to Florence. He studiously avoided every occasion of meeting him. The name of Eugenius became ever more and more synonymous with pagan reaction, and there is no doubt that this threat of a revival of paganism, already humiliated and now almost expiring, decided Theodosius to take energetic action against the usurper. He left Constantinople at the end of May, 394, met Eugenius not far from Aquileia, and completely defeated him. Eugenius was killed by a soldier, and Arbogast committed suicide during his flight.

The first thought of Theodosius was to apprise St. Ambrose of his victory. His friendship for him was so real that he had been a little pained on learning that he was no longer at Milan. Had St. Ambrose despaired of the

³⁷ Cfr. Paulinus, *Vita S. Ambrosii*, ch. xxvii, xxviii, and xxxi.

success of Theodosius? If so his letter lxi³⁸ soon dispelled this slight cloud.

“If I understand your august letter aright, . . . you thought that I had left Milan because I believed that God had abandoned your cause. But I am not so imprudent, nor so little conscious of your courage and your merits as to absent myself without being convinced beforehand that your piety would draw down succour from Heaven, so as to deliver the Roman Empire from the cruelty of a barbarian brigand and from the power of an unworthy usurper. I made haste to return the moment I knew that the man [Eugenius], whom I thought I had every good reason to avoid, had left. For I had not abandoned the Church at Milan, which God had been pleased to entrust to me. But I was anxious to flee from the presence of a man who had soiled himself with sacrilege.³⁹ I therefore came back to Milan about the 1st of August, and have not stirred since that day. Here, Your Clemency’s letter has reached me.

“Thanks be to the Lord, our God, who has had regard to your faith and piety! Showing forth again the manner of His holy dealing of old, He has given us in our day a manifestation of His power similar to those we marvel at in Scripture. His divine suc-

³⁸ *P. L.*, xvi, 1237.

³⁹ By the favours granted to the pagans.

cour has made itself felt in the midst of battle, so that neither the summits of mountains have impeded your course, nor the hosts of the enemy have opposed to you the smallest obstacle.⁴⁰ You think I ought to offer up thanks to the Lord our God for these favours; I will do so willingly, conscious of your merit. . . . All unworthy as I am to fulfill such a function and to offer such prayers, I will tell you, nevertheless, what I have already done. I brought with me up to the altar the letter from Your Piety; I laid it there; I held it in my hand whilst I offered the Sacrifice, in order that it might be *your* faith which spoke through my lips, and that *your* written words might participate in the oblation offered by the priest.

“Yes, in very truth, God is regarding the Roman Empire with a favourable eye, inasmuch as He has laid his choice on such a prince, such a father, whose triumphant courage in the exercise of supreme power is allied to such great humility as to outshine all previous emperors, and similarly his humility outstrips even that of priests. What more can I wish for now? What is there left for me to desire for you? You have everything. . . . Let me nevertheless crave that you may increase yet more in piety—is this not the fairest of the gifts which the Lord has given you? Further that, thanks to Your

⁴⁰ Cf. Theodoret's account, *H. E.*, v, 24 and Rauschen, *Jahrbücher*, p. 412.

Clemency, the Church of God may enjoy with gladness the tranquil peace of innocence, that it may obtain that same pardon which you extend to the guilty. Pardon, above all, those who have not previously committed a crime. May God preserve Your Clemency; *Amen*."

In another letter ⁴¹ St. Ambrose returns to the charge in order to obtain from Theodosius some measure of clemency for the partisans of Eugenius. His prayer was heeded. The Emperor granted a very wide amnesty to the rebels. Exception was made only in the case of those who had accepted an official dignity from the usurper; these were disgraced. But a year later, in May, 395, Honorius, giving effect to one of the last wishes of Theodosius, ⁴² cancelled their disgrace by a law. ⁴³

St. Ambrose was to enjoy the presence of Theodosius at Milan only for a short time. The exertions entailed on the Emperor by the war proved fatal, and he died during the night of January 17th, 395, after a short illness.

Forty days later, St. Ambrose delivered his

⁴¹ *Ep.*, lxii.

⁴² Ambrose, *De Obitu Theod.*, § 5 (*P. L.*, xvi, 1450).

⁴³ *Cod. Theod.*, XV, xiv, 11-12.

funeral oration at Milan in the presence of Honorius and the army. In moving terms he enumerated the moral virtues of the man whom the Roman world was lamenting, and invited his hearers to extend to the son of Theodosius the fidelity they had shown to his father:

“Let us strive ever more and more not to show ourselves ungrateful for the benefits with which he adorned our lives, but let us prove by our pledges our gratitude for the benevolent and paternal sentiments of the pious Emperor. Pay back to the sons ⁴⁴ what you owe to the father; after his death you owe him more than during his life. If in the case of private persons it is not lawful to violate the rights of children who are minors, how much more so when these children are the sons of an emperor,—nay more, the sons of a pious emperor, of an emperor who was merciful and faithful. . . .

“Theodosius, of august memory, thought he was receiving a favour when he was asked to pardon; and he was all the more disposed to forgive in proportion as his anger had been violent. Thus his very irritability was a guarantee of pardon, and in his case people hoped for an access of anger, which is a thing to be feared in others. For the guilty this

⁴⁴ Arcadius, born in 377, and Honorius, born Sept. 9th, 384.

was the means of their salvation. While he possessed supreme authority over all, he preferred rather to grant forgiveness as a father than to pronounce punishment as a judge. How many times have we not seen men trembling before him when he was loading them with just reproaches! And then, when convicted of their crime, they had given up all hope, they found themselves pardoned. It was because he wished to tame the guilty, not to strike them down. He made himself a just arbitrator in a quarrel, but not a judge to sentence, and never refused pardon to a man who confessed his guilt or, if a guilty man concealed his crime in the recesses of his conscience, he left it to God to punish him. Men feared his words more than his punishments, for such was the moderation of Theodosius that he preferred to bind people to him through respect rather than fear.

“In bringing this discourse to a close I will say for myself that I loved this prince so full of mercy, so humble in the exercise of his power, gifted with a pure heart brimful of gentleness, and well fashioned to please the Lord, who has said: ‘In whom shall I rest my trust, if not in the man who is gentle and humble?’ (Cfr. Is., lxvi, 2). Yea, I loved this prince, who accepted reproaches more readily than flattery. . . . I loved him, who sent for me in his last moments, and with his frame all shattered called for me and gave more anxious thought to the condition of the churches than to his own peril. Yea, I con-

fess that I loved him, and further, that I felt the sorrow of his death to the depths of my heart, and thought to find some assuagement of my grief in this over-long discourse. I loved him, and dare to hope that God will hear my prayer rising in favour of this pious soul. . . .

“Theodosius is therefore enjoying the celestial light; in gladness he is mingling with the assembly of the saints. Up above he is embracing Gratian, now no longer bewailing his wounds because he has found an avenger, and whose soul, although he was prematurely snatched away by a shameful death, has none the less entered upon the fruition of his rest. Up above these two upright men, who in such large measure understood the meaning of piety, together taste the joys of the reward of their compassion. To them we can apply these words of Scripture, ‘Day to day uttereth speech’ (Ps., xviii, 3). Maximus and Eugenius, on the contrary, plunged into hell, are like ‘Night to night sheweth knowledge’ (*ibid.*); their miserable example shows what it costs to bear arms against one’s prince. Of them it may be said: ‘I have seen the wicked highly exalted and lifted up like the cedars of Libanus. And I passed by and lo he was not.’ (Ps. xxxvi, 35–36). The pious man has passed from the darkness of this world to light eternal; and already the wicked man was no more found, the time of his iniquities had ceased.”

Further on St. Ambrose associates with the memory of Theodosius that of Constantine, the first Christian Emperor, and his mother Helena. He relates the discovery of the true Cross and recalls that Helena had one of the nails of the Cross fitted to Constantine's diadem:

"She did wisely thus to place the Cross on the heads of kings, so that the Cross of Christ might be adored even in the person of monarchs. O Blessed Nail holding this Roman Empire, to which the entire universe gives its allegiance, and serves to adorn the brow of sovereigns and has turned into heralds of the faith those who had been persecutors! (*Ut sint prædicatores qui persecutores esse consueverunt.*)" ⁴⁵

In this transformation celebrated by St. Ambrose few men had co-operated more effectively than he himself, and no other page of his life could better close the record of his political work, so entirely devoted to the good of the Church and to the consolidation of the Christian Empire.

⁴⁵ *P. L.*, xvi, 1465.

CHAPTER II

ST. AMBROSE AS EXEGETIST

THE letters of St. Ambrose are sufficient to prove that he enjoyed real renown as an exegetist. In very many of them we see him giving answers to correspondents who had presented to him their difficulties.¹ He gives them his considered opinions. His exegetic works, properly so-called, are very considerable. St. Ambrose may therefore be rightly regarded as one of the principal representatives of exegesis in the West, more especially of allegorical exegesis, the origin and development of which I will briefly trace by way of introduction.

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The term *allegoria* does not appear in Latin before the time of Cicero,² and Philo was the

¹ Cf. *Ep.*, vi, vii, viii, xix, xxvii, xxxiii, xliii, xlv, xlv, 1, lviii, lxiv to lxx, lxxii.

² Cicero still wrote the word, as a rule, in Greek characters. Cfr. *Orator*, 94; *Ad Att.*, xx, 3, etc.

first Greek writer to employ it; but the underlying idea goes back much farther. In his work, *La Critique des Traditions Religieuses chez les Grecs*,³ M. Decharme draws attention to the prevalence, at quite an early period, of the idea that "the first poets—those who had given the myths their oldest form—could not have been men merely endowed with the glory of a powerful imagination and the supreme gift of harmony; they must have been wise men as well, and philosophers, . . . and they must have expressed in their own way, in poetical language, what they knew and what they thought about the phenomena of the world and of the human soul." The earliest critics of Homer had already noticed that in many places that poet had shaken the idea that human reason was based inviolably on what is divine. Thus they came to suppose that the poet could not have intended to say what he seemed to mean, and that under the apparent, we must needs seek the hidden, sense. Such was the conclusion arrived at by Theagenes of Rhegium, a contemporary of Cambyses, who interpreted a certain number of passages in the poems of Homer allegorically. Metro-

³ Paris, 1906, p. 272.

dorus of Lampsacus, a disciple of Anaxagoras, applied this principle still more widely. In his commentary on Homer he considers the Homeric gods, not as really living and acting personalities, but as the forces of nature. After that, allegory was liberally applied to the poems of Homer, and assumed different forms, —physical, moral, psychological,⁴ etc.

When the Stoics began to reconcile the traditional myths with philosophy, they found no better method of escaping from many immoral or ridiculous legends than by recourse to a system of exegesis which had already been proved. Like their predecessors they credited the poets, who had created the myths, with scientific intentions; the gods, and the legends of the gods, wore the appearance of a poetic transposition from nature, its phenomena and its laws.⁵ They also attributed to them moral or psychological intentions. In a word, they neglected none of the methods of interpretation that had come down to them, but employed them with greater logic and boldness than had been done before, and were able to co-ordinate

⁴ Thus Athene represented learning, Aphrodite love, etc.

⁵ See the examples given by Decharme, *op. cit.*, pp. 315–347.

them with their conception of a God who was one, immanent, and everywhere present in nature, of whom the gods, in their view, were but different manifestations.

Far from being foreign to the Greek habit of mind, allegorical exegesis had thus in the course of centuries become an integral part of their culture. Their extremely supple intelligence had not failed to take pleasure in this ingenious and subtle method of divining and bringing to light many things lying concealed under passages that to all outward appearance were most simple.

When the Jews, who had settled in Alexandria after the conquests and death of Alexander, had learned to understand the philosophy of Greece, they could not resist feeling a lively admiration for it. But while allowing themselves to be attracted by its profundity and beauty, they remained scrupulously faithful to their Sacred Books, the depositaries of their faith. They unreservedly accepted the doctrine of literal inspiration; in their eyes the Old Testament had been dictated by God Himself to His accredited writers. All wisdom must, therefore, be included therein, without excepting the Greek. But how discover it?

How compel the disdainful Greeks to recognise it? How safeguard a large number of passages in Scripture from their mockery and contempt? In this predicament, allegory, the method of interpretation which the Greeks themselves had taught them, presented itself.

It is true that some of their exegetists remained obdurate,⁶ but the majority adopted this method without hesitation.⁷ Philo, for example, who was destined to exercise so much influence on Christian hermeneutics, while he did not absolutely reject the literal sense, declared that we must convince ourselves "that the letter of Holy Scripture is like the shadow cast by a body, and that the mystical meanings emerging from the Scriptures are the true reality."⁸ Under the inspiration of this principle he attributes a purely mystical value to passages (the letter of which seemed to him to be inadmissible) in which God is spoken of as be-

⁶ Those whom Philo calls *οἱ τῆς ρητῆς πραγματείας σοφισταὶ* (*De Som.*, i, 102; Cohn and Wendland's smaller ed., III, 210).

⁷ In regard to Philo's forerunners, see Émile Brehier, *Les Idées Philos. et Relig. de Philon d'Alexandrie*, pp. 45 sqq. (Paris, 1908). It is difficult to recognise them with any certainty, but the existence of a Jewish tradition of allegory, prior to Philo, is certain.

⁸ *De Confusione Linguarum*, n. 138; Cohn and Wendland, II, 256.

ing angry, repenting, avenging, and otherwise subject to human passions. In the same way he gives a spiritual meaning to the six days' creation, the tree of knowledge, etc.⁹ It was enough for him if a doctrine or system of morality could be made to co-operate usefully in the salvation of souls, and in making the Jewish law universal.

After the death of Christ, when the new faith made an effort to realize and systematize itself, a difficult task was imposed on the first generation of Christians, and St. Paul was the chief artificer; it became necessary to *Christianize* the Old Testament. It was not possible to repudiate this venerable book, over which the Jews claimed the exclusive possession, basing this claim on the whole history of their race, since Christ Himself had made use of it and had acknowledged it to be divine.¹⁰ But, on the other hand, it was necessary to demonstrate by means of it that Jesus was the Messiah, who had been rejected by the Jews, and in spite of their protests to compel them to read therein the promise of a Messiah meek and per-

⁹ Cf. *Philon*, by the Abbé Martin, pp. 24 sqq. (Paris, 1907).

¹⁰ Luke, iv, 17 sqq., John, v, 89, etc.

secuted, such as He had revealed Himself. This difficult process of welding together the ancient history of the Jews and the entirely new history of Christianity became possible by means of allegorical exegesis.¹¹ St. Paul says: "For it is written in the law of Moses: *Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn.* Doth God take care for oxen? Or doth He say this indeed for our sakes? For these things are written for our sakes: that he that ploweth should plow in hope, and he that thresheth, in hope to receive fruit."¹² St. Paul thus taught the Jews as well as the Christians that the Old Testament acquired its real meaning only in the light of the Christian faith.

In itself this method of understanding the Scriptures under the guise of symbols was not new. The Jews themselves, as I have said, admitted allegory (as also typology or the pre-

¹¹ On this point see Eduard Grafe, *Das Urchristentum und das Alte Testament*, pp. 10 sqq. (Tübingen, 1907). Christ had legitimized in advance the principle of allegorism by applying the miracle of Jonas to the Son of Man (Matt., xii, 39-40).

¹² 1 Cor. ix., 9-10. Compare also Gal. iv, 22 sqq. Likewise, Adam was the prototype of Christ (Rom. v, 14).

figuration of one person by another).¹³ But by making his own an already accredited method of interpretation, St. Paul turned it against them and used it to prove their errors.

From that time onward the constant practice of the Church, whether for the purpose of moral edification, or in controversy and apologetics, familiarised Christians with the idea that the sacred text was susceptible of many applications legitimately deduced from the letter itself. Justin, Irenaeus, and Theophilus of Antioch, each from his own particular point of view, made a practice of allegorical exegesis.

But it was pre-eminently in the catechetical school of Alexandria, under Clement and especially Origen, that allegory was raised into a system and deliberately made use of. Clement and Origen accepted the inheritance of the Alexandrine tradition.¹⁴ Of Clement, Eugène de Faye remarks: "He borrowed all his prin-

¹³ M. Leipoldt thinks he notices in St. Paul the influence, not only of Rabbinism, but also of the Stoics. Cf. *Zeitschrift f. Kirchengeschichte*, Vol. XVI, p. 145 sqq. (1906).

¹⁴ Photius, towards the end of the IXth century, remarked that it was from Philo that ecclesiastical writers had inherited the use of allegory. (*Biblioth.*, 105; *P. G.*, xiii, 373).

ciples and methods from Philo.”¹⁵ The fifth *Stroma* is written almost entirely to justify allegory. “Its leading idea is that the highest truths have always been expressed in symbols, and that, from their very nature, they could not have been expressed otherwise. If you consult the Egyptians, or the Greek sages, Moses and the prophets too, all have made use of symbols.”¹⁶

Origen learnt much from the celebrated Alexandrine.¹⁷ According to the testimony of Porphyry, he must also have profited largely from the works of the Stoics Cherephon and Cornutus, and the way in which these latter interpreted the Greek mysteries must have given him the idea of doing likewise by the Jewish Scriptures.¹⁸

The requirements of his polemic against the Jews, who clung to the actual text of the prophecies in the Bible in order to show that they could not be applicable to Christ, and against certain Gnostics who affected to adhere

¹⁵ *Clement d'Alexandrie*, 2nd ed., p. 222 (1906).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ He quotes with admiration Aristobulus and Philo in the *Contra Celsum*, IV, 51; *P. G.*, xi, 1111.

¹⁸ Quoted by Eusebius in his *Hist. Eccl.*, vi, 19, 8.

scrupulously to the literal sense in order the better to discredit the Old Testament, determined Origen's conviction that there are passages in Scripture which it is impossible to defend if they are taken according to the letter.

"What man of sound mind," he asks,¹⁹ "could believe that there was a first, a second, and a third day, with morning and evening, when the sun was not yet in existence, nor the moon, nor the stars,—and a first day without any sky? Who would be so foolish as to admit that God planted a garden, like a gardener, . . . and in this garden a Tree of Life, whose fruit, eaten with real teeth, could have communicated life, or, inversely, the knowledge of good and evil? And when it was said that God was walking at mid-day in the garden, and that Adam hid himself under a tree, no one, I think, doubts for an instant that here we have figures and that which bears the appearance of a real occurrence, which was not materially realized, but which symbolises mysteries. When Cain fled from the presence of God, the intelligent reader is at once led to inquire what could have been this face of God and in what sense one could have escaped from it. Need I say more?

¹⁹ *De Principiis*, ix, 16–17 (*P. L.*, xi, 377).

There are innumerable passages in which, if not absolutely obtuse, one feels that many things were written as though they had happened, but which did not occur in their literal sense. . . . Therefore, let all who are anxious for the truth refrain from over much disquieting themselves over words and phrases, and occupy themselves rather with the real meaning than with its form of expression."

It was, therefore, only necessary to examine the Scriptures in order to exclude contradictions, improbabilities, "scandals," "pitfalls," and "mysteries" which it had pleased the Spirit of God to sow in "the Law and in the Histories";²⁰ for "the divine power from which the Scriptures proceed did not aim at proposing to us solely those things represented by the letter; these are matters which in their literal sense are sometimes not true, and sometimes absurd and impossible."²¹ To explain by means of allegory these compromising passages was not, in Origen's opinion, to be wanting in respect for the Bible, but, very much to the contrary, to be separating the real intentions of the inspired writers from their out-

²⁰ Cf. *De Principiis*, iv. no. 15 and 19.

²¹ *Ibid.*, no. 18.

ward seeming, and to place in full light the substance of their teaching.²² Moreover, the greater portion of these episodes in the Bible did not appear to him to be in any need of this transformation, being perfectly intelligible and acceptable in their own rendering.²³

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It would hardly be correct to say (as has been sometimes suggested) that St. Ambrose was the first to introduce allegorical exegesis into the West. It is enough to mention—quite apart from the writings of Tertullian, who, to suit the exigencies of his polemics, made use of allegory and combated its use in turn—the curious treatise *De Cibis Judaicis*,²⁴ commonly

²² Cf. *De Principiis*, iv. no. 17.

²³ *Ibid.*, no. 19. For examples of Origen's method, see Abbé Martin in the *Annales de Philosophie Chrétienne*, 1905–1906, pp. 232 sqq., and F. Prat, *Origène*, pp. 133 sqq. (Paris, 1907).

²⁴ Published for the first time by Gagny, in 1545. The manuscripts of this treatise had been lost sight of when Harnack, in 1894 (*Texte und Unters.*, xii, i), announced that one had just been discovered at St. Petersburg. This MS. came from the monastery of St. Pierre de Corbie (hence the name *Corbeiensis*, by which it is known). It had fallen into the hands of a secretary of the Russian Embassy during the French Revolution and was used for Landgraf and Weyman's recension; *Archiv, f. lat. Lexikog. u. Gramm.*, xi, pp. 221–249 (1898).

attributed to Novatian, which made its appearance a few years after the middle of the third century. The purpose of the author was to explain the distinction made by the Jews between pure and impure animals. He observed that to maintain the Jewish interpretations literally was to share in the Gnostic heresy, because in this way we should insinuate, at any rate partially, that the work of God was not all good. In reality these categories laid down in the Jewish law had only an instructive and moral bearing; God wished to make the Jews understand the necessity of avoiding the vices symbolised by the animals whose use He forbade (impurity in pork, theft in the martin, pride in the swan) and to practice the virtues represented by the "pure" animals (peaceful ruminants, fish with scales firm and solid like virtue, etc.).

We must not forget St. Hilary of Poitiers, who in his exegetical writings endeavoured to extract from stories in the Bible *typica significantia*, *interiora significantia*,²⁵ even at the price of some fancifulness.

Moreover, St. Ambrose seems to have been only slightly influenced by his Western fore-

²⁵ See his Commentary on Matthew, v, 13; vii, 8; vii, 9.

runners.²⁶ His office as shepherd of souls, so unexpectedly assumed, obliged him to provide himself at once with some method of oral commentary on the Scriptures. It was quite natural for him to go to Philo and Origen, the past-masters in this method. He very seldom mentions them by name.²⁷ He even on occasion openly combated Philo.²⁸ As a matter of fact both of them, Philo especially, were his usual guides. It was sufficient for him to correct, where the interpretations of the one might seem to be too Jewish, and to avoid (but not always) certain spiritual deductions of the other which appeared to be carried too far. Very well informed in other respects, and extremely conscientious, St. Ambrose did not

²⁶ It might be well to make an exception in the case of Hippolytus (who wrote in Greek). Bonwetsch (*Hippolyts Kommentar zum Hohenlied*, in *Texte u. Unters.*, viii, 2, Leipzig, 1902) has traced to Hippolytus the source of several passages in the treatises *De Isaac et Anima*, *In Ps.*, cxviii, *De Spiritu Sancto*, etc. We know, too, from St. Jerome (*Ep.* lxxxiv, 7; *P. L.*, xxii, 749), that Ambrose made use of Hippolytus for his *Hexaëmeron*.

²⁷ Origen three times (*De Abraham*, II, viii, 54; *Exp. in Ps.*, CXVIII, iv, 16; *Ep.*, lxxv. 1); Philo he quotes once only (*De Paradiso*, iv, 25), but he often makes unmistakable allusions to him.

²⁸ Cf. *Ep.*, xxviii, 1; *De Paradiso*, II, ii; *De Cain et Abel*, I, viii, 32; *De Fuga*, III, iv, 20; *De Noe*, v, 12.

omit to take advantage of the works of his contemporary Basil, with whom he had had personal relations,²⁹ and whose practical good sense and genius he greatly admired. In a word, he appropriated what was useful where he found it, but with marked preference for the masters of allegorical exegesis.³⁰

It is not surprising that his eclecticism turned in this direction. St. Ambrose was by no means an exegetist *ex professo*. He did not aim at writing treatises on sacred hermeneutics, but at presenting to his flock the Scriptures under aspects most inducive to touch and instruct them in the truths pertaining to salvation. The use of allegory permitted him to vary his teaching and to multiply edifying considerations.³¹ Again he had to deal with heretics, whose propaganda he desired to oppose, especially the Manichæans, who, failing to discover in the Old Testament any spirituality sufficiently lofty for their taste, condemned it as the work of the devil. What a triumph it would be for him if he could make

²⁹ See St. Basil's *Ep.*, cxcvii.

³⁰ Cf. Schenkl's edition for parallel passages.

³¹ He remarks (*In Ps.*, CXVIII, 28) that Scripture, especially the Old Testament, contains some coarse episodes, difficult to accept, "*nisi fuerit spiritali dente resolutus.*"

them feel that the sandbanks on which they went aground were imaginary, and that they could only take scandal at the Bible from want of a proper understanding of it! In fact it was by this means that he made a conquest of the mind of St. Augustine, when he (Augustine) was still imbued with Manichæan prejudices. "I was pleased to hear Ambrose," St. Augustine relates, "keep on repeating in his public instructions: 'The letter kills, it is the spirit which gives life.' By removing the veil of mystery enveloping them, he explained in their spiritual meaning those passages which, taken literally, seemed to teach strange errors. And his words no longer possessed anything to shock me, although I was still ignorant whether they were the truth."³²

Such are the fundamental reasons which

³² The extract in full is as follows (*Conf.*, vi, 4; *P. L.*, xxxii, 722): "*Gaudebam etiam quod vetera scripta legis et Prophetarum iam non illo oculo mihi legenda proponerentur, quo antea videbantur absurda, cum arguebam tanquam ita sentientes sanctos tuos; verum autem non ita sentiebant: et tanquam regulam diligentissime commendaret, saepe in popularibus sermonibus dicentem Ambrosium laetus audiebam: Littera occidit; spiritus autem vivificat (2 Cor., iii, 6); cum ea quae ad litteram perversitatem docere videbantur remoto mystico velamento spiritualiter aperiret, non dicens, quod me offenderet, quamvis ea diceret, quae utrum vera essent adhuc ignorarem.*"

caused Ambrose to employ allegorical exegesis. He gave far less heed to scruples of an intellectual kind, such as those which influenced Origen, than to pastoral and practical preoccupations. Once he had mastered the system, he took pleasure in it, and made it a practice. The use of allegory became a habit with him, an artifice for developing his thesis, especially his commentaries on the Old Testament, for as Harnack³³ has very justly remarked, he was much more circumspect in regard to the New Testament, and followed the letter more closely, except when he was forced to establish an agreement between apparent contradictions in the Gospels.

It is not always an easy matter to determine the exact date of these treatises the abstract nature of which offers few clues. The following chronological order may be assigned approximately:³⁴

<i>De Paradiso</i>	375 to 378
<i>De Cain et Abel</i>	375 to 378
<i>De Noë et Arca</i>	378

³³ *Dogmengeschichte*, iii, 30, note 3.

³⁴ For a discussion of these dates the reader is referred to Rauschen, *Jahrbücher der Christl. Kirche* (Freiburg, 1897), Schanz, *Gesch. d. röm. Litteratur*, iv, 1 (1904), and Wilbrand, *Histor. Jahrbuch*, Vol. xli (1921), pp. 1-19.

Apologia Prophetæ

<i>David</i>	Between 383 and 386-7
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<i>Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam</i>	387
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<i>De Helia et Ieiunio</i>	After 386
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<i>In Psalmum 1</i>	" "
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<i>In Psalmum 118</i>	" 387
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<i>De Abraham</i>	" 388
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*De Isaac et Anima**De Bono Mortis**De Jacob et Vita Beata**De Joseph Patriarcha**De Patriarchis**Hexaëmeron**De Interpellatione Job et David**In Psalmos 45, 47, 48, 61.*

<i>De Fuga Sæculi.</i>	After 391
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<i>In Psalmos 35-40</i>	" 394
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<i>In Psalmum 43</i>	397
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Lastly the *De Tobia* and the *De Nabuthe*, which contain no reference that might afford us a date.³⁵

It is remarkable that St. Ambrose found time to write so much with a life so occupied and so much at the disposal of every one as

³⁵ We should note that at least one exegetical work has been lost, namely the *Expositio Isaiaæ Prophetæ*, certain passages of which we are able to reconstruct from quotations made by St. Augustine; cfr. Schanz, p. 308.

was his. But this copious output may be partly explained by the fact that the greater portion of his writings was the outcome of his daily work as a preacher. He was satisfied with writing out his sermons. A characteristic example of this is afforded by one of the most curious of his treatises, the *Hexaëmeron*, which is a long paraphrase of the story of the Creation in Genesis based principally on St. Basil's *Hexaëmeron*,³⁶ in which he did not hesitate to differ from him in places.³⁷ St. Ambrose's *Hexaëmeron* is made up of nine sermons preached six days running during Lent. There are six homilies in the first, third, and fifth books, two in each book. The other books, the second, fourth, and fifth, are made up of one homily each. The places where these separate portions are joined together are clearly seen here and there—the ending and the resumption of a sermon,³⁸ allusions to the declining

³⁶ A French translation of Basil's *Hexaëmeron* will be found in Fillon's work, *Étude Historique et Littéraire sur Saint Basile* (Paris, 1865).

³⁷ See Basil, iv, 5 and Ambrose III, v, 29; Basil, vi, 4 and Ambrose, IV, vii 30; Basil, viii, 6 and Ambrose, V, xviii, 60, etc.

³⁸ I, 6, 24 (Schenkl, Vol. I, p. 23, line 3): “. . . qui est Deus benedictus in saecula”; V, xxiv, 92 (Schenkl, p. 203, line, 23): “. . . et gratulemur quod factus est nobis vesper, et fiat

day,³⁹ or to the fatigue of his congregation⁴⁰—and all these details of composition betray the origin of the *Hexaëmeron*. St. Ambrose was enabled to produce his commentaries by assimilating his literary activity with his practical work, and of all his writings they are perhaps those into which he has put most of the qualities properly called literary and rhetorical, and which possess most distinction. We will now give a few specimens.

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THE GARDEN IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS⁴¹

“If, in the creation of the world, there are certain matters which seem to us hard to understand, and inaccessible to our intelligence, such as, for example, the creation of the serpent and other venomous animals, we must not rashly condemn them. We are only men and cannot yet grasp the motive which determined the creation of each being. Let us not

mane dies sextus”; V, xii, 36 (Schenkl, p. 169, line 12): “*et cum paululum conticuisset, iterum sermonem adorsus ait. . .*”

³⁹ V, xxiv, 84 (Schenkl, p. 199, line 7) “*. . . dum sermonem producimus, ecce iam tibi et noctuae aves circumvolant.*”

⁴⁰ VI, i, i (Schenkl, p. 204, line) “*qui [sermo] etsi per quinque iam dies non mediocri labore nobis processerit,*” etc.

⁴¹ *De Paradiso*, ii, 7 (Schenkl, Part I, p. 268).

then be hasty in criticising what we cannot understand, when it is a question of Divine Scripture. There are very many matters whereof our mind is by no means the measure, and which we must judge according to the profound depths of the divine plan, and the divine word. . . . There is, therefore, no reason to doubt, nor to be scandalized, because the devil was in the Garden. He did not possess the power to close to the saints the road [to Heaven] in order to prevent their ascending it. . . . He received permission to tempt, but not the power to strike them to the ground, except in cases where passion is so weak as to give in with full consent by reason of not knowing how to procure the necessary aid. We should, therefore, recognise by what trick he tempted the first man, on what point he thought he must tempt him, by what method and by what artifice, in order to put ourselves on our guard against him. However, inasmuch as I do not wish in this sermon to give offence to those who do not admit that the devil was in the Garden, I will give them an interpretation of the passage in question conformable to their liking. A teacher before our time,⁴² mindful that man committed sin from motives of pleasure and sensuality, allowed that the serpent is only the symbol of delight, and woman the symbol of sensuality, which the Greeks call *αὔσθησις*, and according to him it was owing to being duped by

⁴² Philo in the *De Opif. Mundi*, 59.

sensuality that the mind—the *νοῦς*, as the Greeks say—became a sinner, as it is written. It is therefore with reason that in Greek *νοῦς* is masculine, like man, and *αἰσθησις*, feminine, like woman. . . .

“The Garden was thus a fertile land—that is to say, a fruitful soul—planted in Eden, which signifies a charming spot, in land well laid out, wherein everything might be a joy to the soul. And in order that you may not blame the feebleness of nature, or the subjecting of this soul to the perils which it might encounter, consider what supports it had at its disposal. There was a spring to water this Garden. What was this spring, if not our Lord Jesus Christ, the spring of life eternal like His Father? Is it not written of Him: ‘For with thee is the fountain of life’ (Ps., xxxv, 10), and again: ‘Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water’ (John, vii, 38) . . .? Yea, He is this fountain springing forth in a highly privileged soul; He is the fountain which waters the Garden, that is to say, the virtues of the soul fruitful in lofty merit. . . .”

Compare this extract with Letter xiv,⁴³ addressed to Orontianus:

“After reading my *Hexaëmeron* you have thought well to ask me if I have written anything on the Gar-

⁴³ P. L., XVI, 1191.

den, and what are my sentiments on this subject. . . . Yes, I wrote on it a long time ago, when I was not yet a veteran in the priesthood. I found that the opinions of a great number of authors are divided about the Garden. Josephus, in his quality of historian, represents it as a place planted with trees and a number of shrubs, and watered by a river divided into four branches. For after the waters were gathered together again into one single place, the earth, nevertheless, was not emptied completely, nor did it lose all its watercourses. To this day even it causes springs to come forth from its belly, and unfolds the meandering rivers, breasts full of milk with which, like a good mother, it nourishes its children. In spite of divergences of opinion, all are agreed that in the Garden there was the Tree of Life, and the Tree of Knowledge, which gave power to discriminate good from evil, and many other trees besides, full of vigour and vitality, trees animated with life and reason. Hence we conclude that the Garden cannot be considered as terrestrial, nor as located in any particular spot, but rather in the highest part of our soul, which is animated and vivified by the moral virtues and by the action of the Spirit of God (*ex quibus colligitur paradisum ipsum non terrenum videri posse, non in solo aliquo, sed in nostro principali, quod animatur et vivificatur animæ virtutibus, et infusione spiritus Dei*). Moreover, inspired by the Spirit, Solomon manifestly declared

that the Garden is in man. . . . And that is why, when speaking of the mysteries of the soul and the Word, or of the Church, whom he wished to affiance to Christ as a chaste virgin, he said, 'My sister, my spouse, is a garden enclosed, a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up' (Cant., iv, 12). . . ."

On the verse of Genesis (Gen. III, 8): "Adam and Eve heard the voice of the Lord walking in the Garden in the evening,"⁴⁴ he comments as follows:

"What does this 'walking' of God signify? Is He not everywhere eternally? But it seems to me that there is a walking of God through the series of Divine Scripture, wherein His presence is visible. Thus when we hear that 'He sees everything' and that 'the eyes of the Lord are upon the just' (Ps., xxxiii, 16); when we read that Jesus 'knew their thoughts' (Luke, vi, 8), and asked 'Why do you think evil in your hearts?' (Matt., ix, 4); when we pass in review all these texts, we see God passing in our midst in some sort. . . . Yes, when the sinner reads these words, he seems to hear the voice of God walking in the evening. Why 'in the evening', if it is not because he only realizes his sin late, and only tardily experiences shame on account of his misdeeds, which should have manifested itself before

⁴⁴ *De Paradiso*, xiv, 68 (Schenkl, i, 325).

his sins were committed? But when sin is all hot in the body, and the soul is troubled by sensuous passions, the sinner does not think of God, in other words, he does not hear God 'walking' in the Divine Scriptures, and 'walking' in the soul of each one of us. . . . God, who searches out the thoughts and intentions, who reaches 'into the division of the soul' (Hebr., iv, 12), then says: 'Adam, where art thou?' How does God speak? Is it with a corporeal voice? No, certainly not; but He gives forth His oracles with much greater force in another way than a corporeal voice could possess. It is this voice that His prophets heard, this voice that the faithful hear, and it is this voice too which the impious ignore. . . ." ⁴⁵

St. Ambrose had just been running over some of the principal events contained in Chapters XXV and XXVI of Genesis: Rebecca consulting the Lord about the two infants struggling in her womb; Isaac digging the wells which had been dug previously by his father Abraham in the valley of Gerara, and finding in one of them living water; then the disputes stirred up against him by the herdsmen of Gerara, and the name *Injustice* which he gave to the wells in dispute; then another

⁴⁵ *De Isaac vel Anima*, iv, 21 (Schenkl, i, p. 656).

well which he had likewise dug, and which was likewise claimed by his adversaries, to which he gave the name *Enmity*, etc. . . .

Without delaying over the natural sense of these details he at once proceeded to extract their spiritual meaning:

“Who, on reading these accounts, can consider them as relating to terrestrial events and not rather to things spiritual? If those celebrated patriarchs, Abraham and Isaac,—or even Jacob, as we see in the Gospel (John iv, 6 and 12)—dug wells, it is because they were the fountains of the human race, and especially of devotion and faith. What are, in reality, the wells of living water, if not the depths of a mysterious doctrine? Agar saw the angel near a well, and Jacob found Rachel, who was to be his wife, near a well. . . . Isaac uncovered a series of wells, beginning with the one near which God had appeared to him; and he did rightly to begin with that one, in order that this well might wash the reasoning portion of his soul and his eyes, in order to make his sight more clear. He also dug many other wells. Wherefore it is written: ‘Drink water out of thy own cistern and the streams of thy own well’ (Prov. v, 15). The more numerous they were, the greater the superabundance of graces. He also

dug a well that had been made formerly by Abraham, his father; from this arose disputes, raised by the herdsmen of Gerara, which means 'a wall'—for where there is a wall, there is a division between things that are hostile, and consequently there is injustice (cf. Ephes. ii, 14) ⁴⁶—and that is why he called it 'Injustice.' Again he dug another, and because of fresh disputes, he called it 'Enmity.' A moral lesson emerges from this: it makes us understand that when once the middle wall of partition has fallen, enmities have come to an end in the flesh of mankind; unity, symbolised by Isaac,—in reality by Christ,—is accomplished, and after this it is natural to find pure water in this well, like some moral lesson which it is profitable to drink. . . ."

There are a large number of other examples which, without taking away anything from their natural meaning, St. Ambrose uses as a jumping off ground for higher flights into moral or mystical interpretation. Especially significant from this point of view is his treatise *De Noë*. In it we see him proposing in set

⁴⁶ In order to understand this mystical language we must bear in mind the verse from Eph. ii, 14: "For he is our peace, who hath made both one [Jews and Gentiles] and breaking down the middle wall of partition, the enmities in his flesh."

terms a *sensus altior*,⁴⁷ *subtilior*,⁴⁸ or *alta*,⁴⁹ an *altior interpretatio*.⁵⁰

He established likewise a very clear-cut distinction between *allegoria* on the one hand, and the *simplex intellectus*⁵¹ (*scripti explanatio*,⁵² or *scriptum seriesque verborum*)⁵³ on the other. His method was simple, and one example will be sufficient to make us understand it:⁵⁴

“Let us consider what this passage from Scripture can mean: ‘The fountains also of the deep, and the flood-gates of heaven were shut up’ (Gen., viii, 2). There is nothing obscure in it as it seems to me. The same causes which had made the Deluge increase, also made it subside. The fountains of the deep had overflowed, and the flood-gates of heaven were opened, in order that the earth might be inundated under the mass of waters. It was necessary, therefore, to shut them up in order that the Del-

⁴⁷ xi, 38 (Schenkl, Part I, p. 436, line 25); xvii, 62 (Schenkl, p. 458, line 5); xxiii, 82 (Schenkl, p. 471, line 23 and p. 472, line 15), etc.

⁴⁸ xvii, 59 (Schenkl, p. 454, line 16).

⁴⁹ xix, 69 (Schenkl, p. 463, line 9).

⁵⁰ xxi, 79 (Schenkl, p. 469, line 26).

⁵¹ xv, 52 (Schenkl, p. 449, line 7).

⁵² xv, 54 (Schenkl, p. 451, line 7).

⁵³ xv, 53 (Schenkl, p. 450, line 18).

⁵⁴ xvii, 59 (Schenkl, p. 454).

uge which had arisen from them might begin to abate.

“This is what the letter sounds like (*hoc littera sonat*). But a more subtle interpretation (*subtilior interpretatio*) reveals to us the soul inundated by the deluge of vice and depravity. . . . The Word of God came as a physician to visit this soul, long tormented by interior troubles, and by the sting of passions, and it was necessary first of all to remove the causes of the evil. For it is a principle in medicine to attack the causes of an illness in order to cut short all future aggravation. . . . Once the sting of transgression and sin is softened down, salvation is henceforth assured and the soul recovers its vigour unimpaired.”

AMBROSE'S ESCHATOLOGY

On the nature of the sufferings and punishment of the sinner, St. Ambrose says: ⁵⁵

“That man who does not bring peace and charity to the foot of the altar of Christ, He wills to be taken away hand and foot and cast into outer darkness, ‘where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

⁵⁵ *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam*, vii, 204 (Schenkl, Part IV, p. 374). See upon this passage Niederhuber, *Die Eschat. des hl. Ambrosius* in Ehrhard and Kirsch's *Forschungen*, vi, 3, p. 107 (1907). An effort is made there to diminish its importance.

Does it mean a prison or a dark pit in which the guilty must be shut up? By no means. But those who remain outside the promises and divine ordinance are in outer darkness, for God's commands are the light, and whosoever is without Christ is in darkness. . . . There is, therefore, no real gnashing of teeth or everlasting fire fed by actual flames; there is no actual worm (*ergo neque corporalium stridor aliqua dentium neque ignis aliqui perpetuus flammarum est corporalium neque vermis est corporalis*). This is the real meaning of these passages: just as overmuch fermentation produces fever and vermin, so he who does not dry up his sins by abstinence, or who, by piling up transgressions one upon the other, allows his fresh sins to ferment with the old, as it were, will be burnt in his own fire and consumed by his own worms. This fire is produced by the sadness occasioned by our transgressions; this worm is the sting whereby our insensate sinning tortures the spirit and the senses of the guilty, and searches out, as it were, the bowels of our conscience. . . ."

I will add here two extracts which are interesting as revealing a certain affinity with Millenarianism in St. Ambrose's eschatological ideas. Like Irenæus and Lactantius he seems to have allowed himself to be led away

by the musings of the Jewish apocalyptic writers.⁵⁶

“Scripture gives strong testimony that there are habitations (*habitacula*) prepared for souls up above. Do we not read in the books of Esdras that, when the day of Judgment shall come, ‘the earth shall give up the bodies of the dead, and the dust shall give up the remains of the dead who rest in the tombs. The habitations also (*habitacula*) shall give up the souls that have been entrusted to them, and the Most High shall manifest Himself on His Judgment Seat.’ (4 Esdr. vii, 32).⁵⁷ In speaking of the habitations prepared for souls, Scripture foresees the grief of those who complain that the just who have already lived, appear to be balked of the reward that is due to them up till the Day of Judgment, that is to say, for a long succession of years. It gives them an answer in a very remarkable way by comparing the Day of Judgment to the day when the crown is awarded: ‘They take no count of the slowness of the latter nor of the speed of the former.’

⁵⁶ Cf. on this point Gry, *Le Millenarisme dans ses Origines et son Developpement*, pp. 121 sqq. (Paris, 1904); Turmel, in the *Rev. d'Hist. et de Litt. Relig.*, 1900, p. 97; also Niederhuber, *op. cit.* p. 198 sqq. who endeavours to exonerate St. Ambrose from millennarianism save in a few expressions.

⁵⁷ Observe that St. Ambrose considered as canonical the fourth Book of Esdras.

(4 Esdr. v, 42). . . . The souls, therefore, wait till the times be accomplished for the rewards they have merited,—punishment for some, glory for others. But during this waiting neither the former are without suffering pain, nor the latter without deriving some advantage (*et tamen nec illæ interim sine iniuria, nec istæ sine fructu sunt*); for the former see the glorious recompense which is prepared for those who have observed the law of God, and the habitations reserved to them by the angels, while the latter already know the punishments which their deceit and their obstinacy will draw upon them, and the shame and confusion which await them. . . .⁵⁸

“The Saviour has laid down two kinds of resurrection, and John says in the Apocalypse, ‘Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection’ (Apoc., xx, 6). For these enter into grace without being judged. As regards those who are not admitted to the first resurrection, but are reserved for the second, they will be burnt until they have accomplished the delay between the first and the second resurrection, or if they do not accomplish it, they will remain longer in their torments. Let us hope, therefore, to deserve to have part in the first resurrection.”⁵⁹

⁵⁸ *De Bono Mortis*, 45; Schenkl, I, 741.

⁵⁹ *In Ps. I Expositio*, liv. (*P. L.*, xiv, 994). See also *In Ps. CXVIII*, III, 16 (*P. L.*, xv, 1293).

A MORAL LESSON AND MYSTICAL PRE-
FIGURATION DRAWN FROM GENESIS, I, 9 ⁶⁰

“Here we come to the third day, a joyful day, which was to deliver the earth from shipwreck when God commanded, ‘Let the waters that are under the heaven be gathered together into one place!’ (Gen. 1, 9). I wish to draw some preliminary observations from this verse. God said: ‘Let the waters be gathered together.’ Now it frequently happens that word goes round for the people to gather together, and the people do not gather together at all. It is a matter in no small degree shameful that the senseless elements obey God’s command, while men, to whom the Creator Himself has given the faculty of understanding, obey not at all. Perhaps it is this shame which has made you come in greater numbers to-day, for it could not happen that on this day, when we see the waters gathered together into one place, the people should neglect to assemble in the Lord’s church. . . . The waters, therefore, gathered themselves together from every valley, marsh, and lake. The valley is heresy, is paganism, for God is the God of the mountains, not of the valleys (3 Kings xx, 28). From every valley, therefore, the Catholic people have come together. There are no longer several meetings, but only one; there is only one Church. Here again it is said, ‘Let the waters

⁶⁰ *Hexaëmeron*, III, 1, i and 4 (Schenkl, I, pp. 59 and 60).

be gathered together from every valley'; a spiritual concourse took place, one united people was formed. The Church is supplied from among heretics and pagans. The valley is the circus with its abject contests, its hideous strife, and it is from there, from those who find their favourite amusement in the circus, that the Church is recruited and swelled each day. The marsh is luxury, intemperance, incontinence, where are hidden away the lairs of evil desires, the haunts of the passions, where those who fall into them are engulfed and cannot get out; . . . and it is out of all this filth that faith is formed and purity of soul and simplicity of heart fashioned."

A PICTURE OF THE SEA ⁶¹

"God saw that the sea was good. In fact, it presents admirable beauties, either when its white foaming billows lift themselves up in mountains of water and scatter over the rocks a spray glistening like snow, or when its waves murmur under a gentler breeze, and over their calm depths cast a purple hue whose reflections are seen from afar by the eyes of those who contemplate them. When its turbulent billows do not advance striking the neighbouring shores with violence, but visit and greet them with pacific embrace, how sweet is the sound of the sea,

⁶¹ *Hexaëmeron*, iii, v, 21 and 23 (Schenkl, i, 73).

how pleasant its murmur, how exquisite and harmonious are its rebounds! Nevertheless I do not think that it was the beauty of His creation which caused God to say that the sea was good. The Workman judged that His work corresponded with the design He had conceived. . . .

“How may I understand all the beauty of the sea as God saw it? What is this murmuring of the waves, if not the murmuring caused by the people? So, too, the Church has often been rightly compared to the sea. It is inundated by the waves of the people, who come in, and whom it vomits forth from its vestibules; then during prayer, from the whole congregation, like the ebbing waves, there rises a noise, when the responses of the Psalms, the singing of men, women, virgins, and children re-echoes with a loud noise like the waves dashing together and breaking. And does not the water, too, wash away sin, and does not the health-giving breath of the Holy Spirit make itself felt? . . .”

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE BIRDS

In certain chapters of the *Hexaëmeron*, in connection with the account of the creation, St. Ambrose describes the habits of animals, and from more or less legendary and fictitious pictures he extracts all manner of edifying

considerations, and likewise others which are only moderately flattering to humanity. Before him St. Basil had adopted the same procedure in his nine Homilies on the *Hexaëmeron*, whence St. Ambrose drew his principal model.⁶² But the latter also borrowed from the *History of Nature* by Elienus,⁶³ and from that of Pliny,⁶⁴ not to mention many reminiscences from poets like Virgil.⁶⁵ These extracts are interesting because we see in them, as it were, the first outline of that symbolism with which the Middle Ages, persuaded that there was nothing in the universe which did not possess its "significance," beclouded the nature of animals.⁶⁶

"Let us therefore begin⁶⁷ with the birds from which in some characteristics we can take an ex-

⁶² Cf. the dissertation by Plass, *De Basilii et Ambrosii Excerptis ad Historiam Animalium Pertinentibus*, pp. 40 sqq. (Marburg, 1905). The idea that animals and things themselves are symbols of virtues and vices, goes back to the Stoics. Cfr. Heinisch, *Der Einfluss Philos auf die älteste Christliche Exegese*, p. 11 (Münster i. W., 1908).

⁶³ Heinisch, p. 51.

⁶⁴ Heinisch, p. 54.

⁶⁵ Heinisch, p. 56.

⁶⁶ See Auber's *Histoire et Théorie du Symbolisme Religieux avant et depuis le Christianisme*, Vol. III, p. 469 sqq. (Paris).

⁶⁷ *Hexaëmeron*, V, xv, 50 (Schenkl, 1, p. 178).

ample. With what spontaneity, free from constraint, do the cranes mount their watchful guard by night! We see their sentinels, each one at his post, and while the rest of the flock take their repose, they come and go with eye alert, in order to ward off any ambuscade. . . . When once their time of watch is accomplished, they go to sleep, after uttering a shrill cry to awaken those whose turn has come. The latter willingly accept their turn, and without making excuse and with no sluggishness (as happens with us), fulfil their task with a similar zeal and sentiments of duty. With them there is no desertion to fear because their devotion is natural to them. The watch is well kept because their will is free. . . . With men, on the contrary, what a bad grace they show when it falls upon them to undertake weary vigils! With what annoyance does each one accept the perilous post in the camp assigned to him by his chief! In spite of the punishment promised for sluggishness, as a rule carelessness takes possession of him. For bearing in mind that there is nothing so easy as not to offer difficulties, the necessity which imposes a duty on the unwilling is perforce accompanied by disgust. . . .

“Let men learn to love their children with the affection of the crows for their little ones. When the latter fly, they follow them with uneasy attention, fearing lest their feebleness may cause them to fall. They procure for them their means of subsistence

and for quite a long time make it their business to nourish them. With us, on the contrary, women are in a hurry to wean the children they love, or, if they be rich, they scorn to suckle them. As for poor women, they get rid of theirs, they expose them, and when they are found, refuse to take them back. The rich, from fear of seeing their fortune divided up between many heirs, use murderous juices to kill the children within the womb of the mother. They take away their life even before they have given it to them. . . .”

“And the turtle dove!⁶⁸ When the death of her mate has rendered her a widow, it is said that she conceives a distaste for the nuptial bond and for the very word marriage,⁶⁹ inasmuch as her first love has given her the sorrow of seeing the death of the one she cherished. . . . She, therefore, refuses to contract a fresh union and to break the bond which united her to the one she loved. For him alone she reserves her tenderness, for him alone she retains the name of spouse. Learn from this, ye women, the beauty of widowhood, since this is held in esteem even among birds. Who gave these laws to the turtle-dove? Was it man? Assuredly not. No man would have dared, since Paul himself did not dare, to prescribe by a formal law the preservation of widowhood.

⁶⁸ *Hex.*, V, xix, 62 (Schenk1, p. 187).

⁶⁹ “*Pertaesum thalamos et nomen habere coniugii*,” etc. Cfr. Virgil, *Æn.*, iv, 16-18.

'I will therefore that the younger should marry, bear children, be mistresses of families, give no occasion to the adversary to speak evil.' (1 Tim. v, 14). And again, 'It is good for them if they so continue. . . . But if they do not contain themselves, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to be burnt' (1 Cor. vii. 8-9). Paul, therefore, desires for women what the turtle-doves know so well to preserve. And if he counsels the young to marry, it is because our women attain with difficulty the state of chastity of the turtle-dove. . . . The turtle-dove knows nothing of the fires which are lighted by youth in its flower, and the temptations of enticing occasions. It has no idea of annulling its first trust, but knows how to preserve that chastity promised in its first union.

"We have just been saying with what fidelity the birds maintain their widowhood, and that it is they who have given the first example of this virginity said to exist among a large number of them. Even the vultures practise it. It is said that they are ignorant of connection, that they never use the conjugal rite, and that when they conceive it is without the aid of the male or of any union beforehand. Nevertheless their young live to an extreme old age, even sometimes to a hundred years . . . What can they say who make a practise of deriding our mysteries the moment they hear us speaking of a virgin who had a child, and who declare that it is im-

possible that a woman not married and whose chastity remained inviolate, brought forth a child? When it is a question of the Mother of God, they deem that to be impossible which they do not consider impossible at all in the case of vultures! A bird reproduces without the coöperation of the male, and no one contradicts it; and because Mary brought forth when but an affianced bride, they throw doubts upon her chastity. Is it not true that the Lord had already given many examples from nature destined to prove the beauty of the Incarnation and to establish its truth?" ⁷⁰

A SCIENTIFIC DISCUSSION CONCERNING THE CONSTITUTION OF THE HEAVENS ⁷¹

"We cannot deny that there is not only a second, but also a third heaven. Does not the Apostle [Paul] give testimony in his Epistles that he was 'rapt even to the *third heaven*' (2 Cor. xii, 2)? David also speaks of the 'heaven of heavens' in his chorus of praise which he raises up to God (Ps. cxlviii, 4). Following him, philosophers have imagined a harmonious movement of five globes formed of the stars, the sun, and the moon, . . . which, joined together as though each were placed within the other, are each drawn in opposite directions,

⁷⁰ *Hexaëmeron*, V, xx, 64 (Schenkl, 1, p. 188).

⁷¹ *Hexaëmeron*, II, ii, 6 (Schenkl, p. 45).

and that from all these evolutions is born a sound of exquisite sweetness, suavity, art, and modulation. Vibrating from this combination of perfectly regulated movements, it is said the air gives back a happy mingling of high and deep notes, of chords so various and well attuned that they surpass the pleasure to be derived from any music whatsoever.

“But if you ask them to prove what they say, if you declare that you will only believe them after hearing this harmony with your own ears, they become embarrassed.

“How are we to admit, we may ask ourselves, that the noise of the spheres—one of which, the celestial sphere, to which the stars in their eternal course are fixed, revolves more rapidly, according to them, and gives forth a high note, while the lunar sphere gives a very low note—is not perceived by us, who can usually hear far lighter sounds. . . . To this they reply that our ears are not attuned to perceive it, that our sense of hearing has become blunted, or because from the first moment of our birth we have become accustomed to it; and they instance the example of the Nile, the greatest of all rivers, which at the place of its cataracts makes such a roaring noise that it stops up the ears of the inhabitants in the neighbourhood, who, they say, can no more hear anything.

“But we can easily make answer to this. If we hear the thunder, which is produced by the shock

of the clouds, how should we not hear the rolling of these immense masses, whose movement of another kind is a mighty one, and whose sound is consequently great in another way?

“There is yet another explanation. They say that if the sound of this harmony does not reach the earth, it is due to the fear lest men, from the East to the West, overcome by its suavity and sweetness, might forget their occupations and their work, and, suspended in a kind of ecstasy at this celestial music, let everything else go. But let us leave to the profane these questions foreign to our studies and to the order of the divine text, and let us stick to the authority of the Scriptures.”

These few extracts will be sufficient, I think, to give an idea of St. Ambrose's method of exegesis. Many different elements find a place therein—scientific discussions, refutations of metaphysical errors, moral exhortations, extensive pictures carefully composed and unfolded, and occasionally even useful remarks on the text, authors, and the etymology of words. St. Ambrose had no need to search so conscientiously through ecclesiastical and profane writers; his developments possess a sequence and unity which prove that, with very rare exceptions, he had well assimilated his

models. But of all these elements, allegory is by far the most important and occupies the largest place. It allowed St. Ambrose to make many happy amplifications of the sacred text; it also led him on, as the reader has been able to judge, to some risky speculations and some regrettable errors of taste.

Taking all in all, one should not underrate the services rendered to ecclesiastical knowledge by allegorical exegesis for the purpose of escaping from certain difficulties in Scripture, or to make out the connection and build a bridge between the Old and New Testament, or to draw from Scripture lessons appropriate to the infinite multiplicity of human life. It cannot, however, be disputed that this system has never failed to awaken mistrust in the minds of Christians.⁷² Origen complained of the calumnies which "the advocates of the letter" had hatched against him in order to paralyse his free interpretations.⁷³ The Anti-

⁷² Marcion had rejected it in the second century. Cfr. Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte*, I, p. 293.

⁷³ *Hom. in Gen.*, xiii, 3 (*P. G.*, xii, 232): "*Si ergo incipiam et ego veterum dicta discutere et sensum in eis quaerere spiritalem, si conatus fuero velamen legis amovere et ostendere allegorica esse quae scripta sunt, . . . statim mihi movebunt calumnias amici litterae et insidiabuntur mihi, inimicitias continuo*

ochian School, heir of the Aristotelian spirit through the intermediary of Paul of Samosata, one of his exponents, had no qualms in proclaiming its antipathy to allegory. It prided itself on providing its commentaries with a substructure of sound philological and grammatical comment in quite another way.⁷⁴ In one of his homilies,⁷⁵ Basil the Great remarks (and it is evident he had in mind Origen and his followers), that "there are some who do not admit the common meaning of Scripture, to whom "water does not mean water, but anything else you please, . . . who interpret the creation of reptiles and wild beasts according to their own particular notions. . . . As far as I am concerned, 'grass' means grass; whether plant, fish or domestic animal, I take things to be as they are said; for I am not ashamed of the Gospel."⁷⁶

Must we seek for the origin of this reaction

et persecutiones parabunt, veritatem negantes stare posse nisi super terram."

⁷⁴ Cf. Harnack, *Dogmengesch.*, II, p. 77.

⁷⁵ *Hom.*, ix, 1 (*P. G.*, xxix, 188).

⁷⁶ Among other testimony to the opposition to Origen on the question of allegory, cfr. St. Eustathius of Antioch, *De En-gastrimythio contra Origenem*, especially § 22 (*P. G.*, xviii, 657 and 659). According to Ebedjesu, Theodore of Mopsuestia wrote five books against the allegorists.

(of which it would be easy to bring forward other indications) in the ridicule of the pagans? For among the adversaries of Christianity (and they were by no means unskilful), we find a Celsus,⁷⁷ a Porphyry,⁷⁸ who turned into ridicule all the pains taken to elaborate, as so many enigmas, words the meaning of which was perfectly clear,⁷⁹ only to end in stupefying the critical faculty of the soul.⁸⁰ But the Christian polemists scored a point by replying that the pagan philosophers also were not slow in drawing upon allegory for the means whereby to save polytheism by giving some reasonable appearance to the most absurd legends.⁸¹ However unscientific, and

⁷⁷ Cfr. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, iv, 48 (*P. G.*, xi, 1085). Origen enumerates the scoffs of Celsus on the passage in Genesis which describes woman as formed out of Adam's rib, and on the allegorical explanations by which Jews and Christians sought to interpret it.

⁷⁸ Quoted by Eusebius, *H. E.*, VI, xix, 4.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, Αἰνίγματα γὰρ τὰ φανερώς παρὰ Μωύσει λεγόμενα εἶναι κομπασάντες.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*: διὰ τε τοῦ τύφου τὸ κριτικὸν τῆς ψυχῆς καταγοτεύσαντες.

⁸¹ See Athenagoras, *Πρεσβεῖα*, § 22 (*P. G.*, vi, 936); Tatian's *Discourse to the Greeks*, § 21 (*P. G.*, vi, 853); Tertullian's *Adv. Marcionem*, i, 13 (Kroyman, 307); Firmicus Maternus, *De Errore Prof. Relig.*, vii, 7 (Halm, p. 88); Arnobius, *Adv. Nationes*, iii, 29; v, 32 (Reifferscheid, pp. 130 and 202); Lactantius, *Inst. Div.*, i, 17 (Brandt, i, 63); Augustine, *Civ. Dei*, vii, 5 (Hoffmann, I, 308).

even compromising, this argument did not fail to reassure their minds.

The real danger which seemed to be inherent in the allegorical method was the subtle facility with which heresy provided so many resources for building up personal constructions upon the Scriptures. Origenism was already a rock of scandal. The anti-Arian disputes imposed upon the orthodox the necessity of being precise.⁸² Learned scholars, too, could not fail to notice that there was something rather puerile in this method. St. Jerome notes the temptation offered to the allegorist to admire his own subtleties as something profound, nay, divine.⁸³ Not that he condemns the practice in itself. His ideal would have been to mingle the two modes of interpretation—allegorical and historical; ⁸⁴ or to apply one to the other.⁸⁵ But he appears also to have considered it to be a mark of intellectual progress to be able to

⁸² This fact is remarked by M. Leipoldt in his excellent *Geschichte des Neutestamentlichen Kanons*, p. 22 (1907).

⁸³ “. . . *Ingenium suum facit Ecclesiae sacramenta.*” *Praef.*, V, *Comm. in Is.* (P. L., xxiv, 158).

⁸⁴ “*Quasi inter saxa et scopulos, sic inter historiam et allegoriam orationis cursum flectere.*” *Comm. in Naum*, § 2 (P. L., xxv, 1243).

⁸⁵ “*Unde post historiae veritatem, spiritualiter accipienda sunt omnia.*” *Comm. in Is.*, *Praef.* (P. L., xxiv, 20).

pass from the allegorical to the historical method.⁸⁶

Notwithstanding all these criticisms and scruples, St. Jerome did not succeed in totally eradicating allegorical exegesis, nor even in discrediting it. It was then that the influence of St. Ambrose on the later destinies of Scriptural interpretation was shown in a marked degree.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Cfr. what he says about his first attempt in the commentary on the prophet Abdias, which he wrote when quite young. (*P. L.*, xxv, 1097).

⁸⁷ Certain of the exegetical treatises of St. Ambrose, especially the *Hexaëmeron* and the *Expositio Evang. sec. Lucam*, have come down to us in very many manuscript copies. See the Preface to Part I and Part II of Schenkl's edition.

CHAPTER III

ST. AMBROSE AS MORALIST

WHATEVER disappointment the reader may find in the *De Officiis Ministrorum*, it is indisputably a work of great importance. We must consider that though Christianity had been from the start unremittingly concerned with moral problems from the theoretical and practical point of view, there was not yet in the fourth century any synthesis of its ethical teaching worthy to be opposed to the great pagan synthesis.¹ St. Ambrose, in the full maturity of his talent and pastoral experience,² was in a position to make the attempt at such a synthesis.

The choice of the word *officium*, at that time a novelty in ecclesiastical language,³ and the

¹ Cf. Scullard's *Early Christian Ethics in the West, from Clement to Ambrose* (London, 1907).

² The *De Off.* is certainly later than the year 386, as is proved by the allusion (I, xviii, 72) to the Arian persecution raised against the Catholics by Justina in 385 and 386.

³ St. Augustine remarks (*Ep.*, lxxxii, 21): "*Quia non tam usitatum est in ecclesiasticis libris vocabulum officii, quod Am-*

express mention which he makes of his fore-runners, Panætius and his son among the Greeks, and Cicero among the Latins,⁴ clearly reveal his ambition. But far from proclaiming this, he disguises it under the most modest professions. He calls his treatise a simple talk on moral questions with his clerics, in the course of which he will take the opportunity to correct many philosophic notions current among the pagans. Nowhere does he assume the tone of a thinker who intends to give a *Summa* of the moral doctrines to which he had devoted his life. He even declares that he is little concerned to write a methodical account, and that he is contented to paraphrase the beautiful examples of which Scripture offers such an abundance.⁵

In reality there is much capriciousness, much disconnectedness in his handling of the subject. Here, as elsewhere, St. Ambrose maintains the free style which he had acquired

brosius noster non timuit, qui suos quosdam libros utilium praeceptionum plenos de Officiis voluit appellare." St. Ambrose justifies the use by stating that the word occurs in the Gospel (Luke, i, 23) as a rendering of the Greek *λειτουργία*. He derives it from *efficere* (*De Off.*, I, viii, 25-26).

⁴ *De Off.*, I, vii, 24.

⁵ *De Off.*, I, xxv, 116.

in his sermons.⁶ Whom, then, is he addressing? Is it only his clerics or the general body of Christians? A certain amount of hesitation is sometimes excusable,⁷ and hence arises a certain want of clearness and unity.

St. Ambrose followed Cicero very closely both in the general plan of his work⁸ (in spite of a few necessary digressions), and also in detail, sometimes even in his very expressions.⁹ It will, therefore, be interesting to

⁶ Certain precepts permit us to suppose that he utilized some of his sermons in the *De Officiis*. See for instance, II, vi, 25; I, iii, 13; I, viii, 25; I, vii, 23. On this point cfr. Th. Schmidt, *Ambrosius, sein Werk de Officiis Libri III und die Stoa*, p. 12. (1897).

⁷ Cf. *De. Off.*, I, vii, 24; I, xxx, 150; II, vi, 25, etc.

⁸ Book I: concerning goodness, the four cardinal virtues, and the duties springing from goodness; Book II: concerning the useful, and the duties attaching thereto. St. Ambrose, however, develops the notion of the *summum bonum*, which Cicero treated in his *De Finibus*. Book III: concerning the opposition between the good and the useful.

⁹ *E. g.*, Cic., i, 8: "*Et medium quoddam officium dicitur et perfectum.*"

Cic., i, 129: "*Nostro quidem more cum parentibus puberes filii, cum soceris generi non lavantur.*"

Cic., i, 23: "*Fundamentum autem est iustitiae fides,*" etc.

Ambr., I, xi, 36: "*Officium autem omne aut medium aut perfectum est.*"

Ambr., I, xviii, 79: "*Mos vetus fuit, ut filii puberes cum parentibus vel generi cum soceris non lavarentur.*"

Ambr., I, xxix, 142: "*Fundamentum ergo est iustitiae fides.*"

see how St. Ambrose adapts that treasure house of the old learning, Cicero's *De Officiis*, what he rejects and what he retains. The comparison has been often made.¹⁰ We will only indicate the fundamental points.

The spirit in which St. Ambrose utilizes Cicero's *De Officiis* in no way resembles the conciliatory eclecticism of St. Justin, who was always happy to establish points of contact between the ideas of his opponents and his own. St. Ambrose does not put forward Cicero as a model to follow from the point of view of philosophy. He considers him as a remarkable mind lacking the true light and, as a consequence, with nothing quite satisfying to say on questions of moral doctrine. So, too, where St. Ambrose most conspicuously appropriates the notions already analysed and defined in profane philosophy, he thinks he has discovered in the philosophers some good which does not really belong to them, something which was originally filched from Hebrew wisdom. He returns on several occasions¹¹ to the idea of

¹⁰ By R. Thamin in particular, *Saint Ambroise et la Morale Chrétienne au iv^e Siècle, Étude comparée des Traités des Devoirs de Cicéron et de Saint Ambroise* (Paris, 1895).

¹¹ Apart from the *De Officiis Ministrorum*, see *De Abraham*,

an early parting of the ways, which was already familiar to ecclesiastical writers and seems to have been bequeathed to them by the Jews of Alexandria. Thus, to give an example, he finds the notion of *decorum*¹² in the Psalms and in St. Paul: "Our own Scriptures were the first to teach us what is meant by *decorum*, *πρέπον* as the Greeks call it. Do we not read, 'A hymn, O God, becometh thee in Sion' (Ps. lxi, 2)? In Greek it is, *Σοὶ πρέπει ὕμνος ὁ Θεὸς ἐν Σιών*. The Apostle also says: 'But speak Thou the things that become sound doctrine' (Tit., ii, i), and again: 'For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, who had brought many children into glory, to perfect the author of their salvation, by his passion' (Hebr. ii, 10). Must we then assign to Panætius or to Aristotle (who also discoursed on duty) the priority over David, when it is certain that it was only in imitation of David that Pythagoras, himself prior to Socrates, imposed on his followers the law of silence?"

ii, 2 and 6; *Ibid.*, II, vii, 37; *In Ps. 113 Expos.*, ii, 13; *Ep.*, xxviii, *Ad Iren.*, i; *De Bono Mortis*, xlv, etc.

¹² *De Off.*, I, x, 30-31.

The general tone adopted by St. Ambrose is thus sharpened with a polemical edge, which one feels throughout. He is much more aware of the elements separating him from his models than of those which bring him nearer to them. And on every occasion he accentuates the difference between the principles underlying the two systems of morals, his own and that of the pagans.

His treatise in reality is essentially religious. It is nothing else but a vast edifice of doctrine whose different parts fit into one another and lend mutual support one to the other.

“The foundation of justice is faith, that faith on which the heart of the just meditates. . . . Has not the Lord spoken by the mouth of Isaias: ‘Behold I will lay a stone in the foundations of Sion’ (Is., xxviii, 16). What is this stone if not Christ, the foundation of the Church? The faith of all is summed up in Jesus Christ. The Church is like the external form of justice. It is the common right of all, for it prays for us, labours for us, suffers the assaults of temptation for us. He who denies himself, is just, is worthy of Christ. That is why Paul established the Church as the foundation on which we

should build the works of justice, for faith is the foundation of everything.”¹³

Here we see religion firmly welded together with morals. Need we say that in Cicero, and in the philosophers of whom he is the echo, no inspiration of this kind appears? Without denying the existence of God or the immortality of the soul, Cicero, in his *De Officiis*, has no idea of regulating the precepts he gives in accordance with these beliefs. It is hardly paradoxical to say with E. Faguet,¹⁴ that the Greeks and Romans were absolute aristocrats, who knew only one duty, that towards the State, and this means that in their case we have a superior species, knowing no duties towards the slave, the foreigner, the plebeian, nor towards woman, recognizing as a duty only that of maintaining all that constitutes the State in health, strength, vigour, beauty, and in the ability to become greater and to develop indefinitely. This then was all the moral doctrine possessed by the Greeks and Romans, and it means that the Greeks and Romans possessed no moral doctrine at all. It is enough to read Cicero's *De Officiis* (in other ways an admir-

¹³ *De Off.*, I, xxix, 142.

¹⁴ *En Lisant Nietzsche*, p. 212.

able book, although it belonged to the beginning of Rome's decadence), to understand thoroughly that a Roman knew no duty except to his country. That they understood very well."

They understood a few other duties too, it seems, and we can find many a page in the *De Officiis* where Cicero's outlook reaches higher and farther than the interests of the *Res Publica* and the frontiers of the Roman Empire. But it is not open to dispute that the old world knew nothing of duty under its religious form, as being the expression of the will of God.

We shall be able to understand, therefore, that if St. Ambrose borrows from the moral doctrines of the Stoics (of whom Cicero was the most eloquent interpreter) a whole host of ideas,—such as the distinction between reason and the passions, concern for the "sovereign good," the classification of the virtues (wisdom, justice, courage, and temperance), the division of duties into "perfect duties" and "ordinary duties," the value to be assigned to the judgment of conscience, etc.—he imbues them with quite a different spirit, he justifies them by reasons which Cicero could not

have thought of, and finally gives them a meaning, a bearing, and an efficacy which were quite new.

Cicero had accepted in principle the order established by the Stoics between absolute duty, such as the dictate of reason (κατόρθωμα), and relative duty (καθήκον), which was certainly not to be despised, but was inferior to the former. In fact, in his *De Officiis* he hardly treated of any other than the second category of duties, which appeared to him to possess a more general and practical interest.¹⁵ St. Ambrose on his part appropriated the traditional distinction; supporting it with a text from Scripture, wherein "precept" is sharply differentiated from "counsel," he contributed in a large measure to secure for it the permanent approval which it later obtained in the Catholic Church.¹⁶

"Every duty is an ordinary duty or a perfect duty; this we can also prove from the authority of the Scriptures. Let us listen to the Lord in the

¹⁵ *De Off.*, iii, 14: "*Haec officia, de quibus his libris disputamus, media Stoici appellant; ea communia sunt et late patent.*"

¹⁶ See Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte*, Index, under "Sittlichkeit, doppelte."

Gospel: 'If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments' . . . 'Which?' asked the young man; Jesus answered: 'Thou shalt do no murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness. Honour thy father and thy mother, and love thy neighbour as thyself', (Matth. xix, 17 sq.). These are the ordinary duties in which there is still something wanting.

"The young man adds, 'All these have I kept from my youth, what is yet wanting to me?' Jesus saith to him: 'If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.'

"We read similar counsels when the Lord invites us to love our enemies, to pray for them that calumniate and persecute us, to bless them who curse us. This is what we ought to do if we would be perfect as our Father who is in Heaven. . . . This then is the 'perfect' duty, which the Greeks call *κατόρθωμα*, by means of which anything which might have contained an element of failure is put right."¹⁷

Again St. Ambrose finds a way of incorporating in his doctrine of duties the notion of "conformity to nature," which the Stoics put forward as the supreme good, attaching it to the general body of their system. He

¹⁷ *De Off.*, I, xi, 36 (*P. L.*, xvi, 37).

Christianizes the *ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν* " for nature, being the work of God, is necessarily the mistress of virtue.

"Observe that it is becoming to live in conformity with nature, and that what is contrary to nature is shameful. The Apostle asks these questions: 'Doth it become a woman to pray unto God uncovered? Doth not even nature itself teach you that it is a shame for a man to let his hair grow long, because that is contrary to nature?' And he adds: 'But if a woman hath long hair, it is a glory to her.' (Cfr., I Cor., xi, 13 sq.). For that is conformable to nature, since her hair is like a veil unto her, a natural veil. Thus nature herself gives us a character, an exterior appearance, which we ought to preserve.¹⁸

"Let us imitate nature; the mark imprinted by her on us is the precept of discipline, the structure of uprightness (*eius effigies formula disciplinae, forma honestatis est*).¹⁹

"If uprightness is in accordance with nature, since God has made nothing but what is good, evil is contrary to nature. There can then be no relationship between good and evil, since the law of nature has so completely separated them."²⁰

¹⁸ *De Off.*, I, xlvi, 22 (*P. L.*, xvi, 96).

¹⁹ *De Off.*, II, xix, 84 (*P. L.*, xvi, 53).

²⁰ *De Off.*, III, iv, 28 (*P. L.*, xvi, 162).

On analysing each of these exhortations we find an amalgam of Stoicism and Christianity. Sometimes Stoicism predominates, as, for example, in the following portrait of the "wise man," so closely reminiscent of Seneca or Marcus Aurelius:

"The wise man does not shun exile, for he knows that the whole world is his fatherland. He does not fear poverty, for he knows that the wise man never wants for anything, since all the wealth of the universe is his. What is there more noble than a man insensible to gold and despising riches, who from the heights where he dwells gazes down scornfully on human passions? He who raises himself to this attitude is generally regarded as being a super-man. 'Who is this man?' saith Scripture. 'We will praise him, for he hath done wonderful things in his life.' How should we not truly admire him when he despises riches, which the greater number prefer even to their own salvation?" ²¹

But St. Ambrose was very well able to show where he disagreed, and to reject ideas which Christianity could not assimilate:

²¹ *De Off.*, II, xiv, 66 (*P. L.*, xvi, 127).

“The duty of justice, to which the philosophers assign the first rank, is not admitted by us. They say, in effect, that the foremost manifestation of justice consists in doing harm to no one, *provided that no injury has provoked us to it*. The authority of the Gospel annuls this maxim, for Scripture wills that we be animated by the Spirit of the Son of God who came to bring us pardon, and not the return of injuries.”²²

It might be well to study further the cardinal virtues as defined by St. Ambrose and illustrated by examples taken by him from the Bible. *Wisdom*, in his view, includes piety, because it should have as its direct object the search for truth, that is, the practical knowledge of God. *Justice* withers away if it does not attach itself to its real root, divine grace, the mind of the invisible world. *Courage* comes from the source of all strength, the living God. With *temperance*, St. Ambrose includes the Christian concepts of *modestia* and *verecundia*, so little familiar to the pagans.

We may add that he has his own special ecclesiastical concerns. He is thinking above all of his young clerics, those whom he “has be-

²² *De Off.*, I, xxviii, 131 (*P. L.*, xvi, 67).

gotten in the Gospel," and whom he loves, he says, as if he were their real father.²³ He does not omit the counsels of politeness which Cicero had enumerated, but he adapts them to the observances suited to the clerical state.²⁴ When he sets forth his injunctions on the necessity of giving, he has in view principally the forms which the charity of the Church was wont to take, the ransom of captives, for example:²⁵

"There are many kinds of liberality. We can distribute a little food to those whose necessities are a daily occurrence, in order that they may sustain life; we can also interest ourselves in them and go to the aid of those who shun the disclosure of their poverty to the public eye, so far as our resources, which belong to all the unfortunate, will permit. I am now addressing myself to the man who is charged with any function, such as a priest or an almoner. He should render an account to his bishop, and not refuse a man whose poverty or reverse of fortune he has just come to know of, especially if these misfor-

²³ *De Off.*, I, vii, 24.

²⁴ *De Off.*, I, xviii, 71; I, xix, 84; I, xx, etc.

²⁵ The Church always attached special importance to this form of charity. See St. Cyprian's beautiful letter, *Ad Episcopos Numidas, de Redemptione fratrum ex Captivitate Barbarorum* (*Ep.*, lx; *P. L.*, ix, 359).

tunes are not the result of youthful dissipation, but of a robbery or loss which no longer permit the victim to gain his daily bread.

"The highest exercise of liberality is that of ransoming captives, wresting them from the hands of their enemies, preserving men from death, and especially women from dishonour, restoring children to their parents, parents to their children, and citizens to their fatherland. We have seen this only too well when Thrace and Illyria were ravaged.²⁶ How many captives were then put up for sale throughout the world! If they had been collected together, their number would have exceeded the population of an entire province. In spite of this there were men who wished to cast again into slavery even those who had been ransomed by the churches. Harder hearted than slavery itself, they regarded with an evil eye the generosity of others. . . .

"The best form of liberality, therefore, is that which ransoms captives, especially from the hands of the barbarians, who only show pity when their cupidity prompts them not to compromise their ransom; that which takes over the debts of others when the debtor is insolvent and run to earth by his creditors; . . . that which feeds the children and protects the orphans.

"There are some who, in order to preserve the

²⁶ In 378, after the defeat of Valens by the Goths, and his death at Adrianople.

chastity of young girls who have lost their parents, marry them, and help them not only with their solicitude, but even with their money. It is just this kind of liberality which the Apostle recommends: 'If any of the faithful have widows, let him minister to them, and let not the Church be charged; that there may be sufficient for them that are widows indeed' (1 Tim., v, 16"²⁷).

A personal souvenir of St. Ambrose will help us to understand the bearing of this precept:

"The principal incentive to pity is the compassion we feel for the misfortunes of others, which leads us to succour them as far as we are able. It is better to be merciful and give ourselves trouble, or even expose ourselves to jealousy, than to be inhumane. Thus, some time ago we were made the butt of the shafts of envy for having broken up the sacred vessels and converted them into ransom for captives, which had the effect of displeasing the Arians. And yet it was not so much the act itself which shocked them, but they were pleased to find some vulnerable spot in us. . . . We had good reasons for acting as we did. But we did not fail to say and repeat in the midst of the people that it was a better thing to preserve souls for the Lord than to save treas-

²⁷ *De Off.*, II, xv, 69 sqq.

ures. He who sent forth his Apostles without gold, had no need of gold to form His Church. The Church possesses gold, not to hoard, but to scatter abroad and come to the aid of the unfortunate. What is the good of hoarding what serves no purpose? . . . Would not the Lord say to us: 'Wherefore hast thou allowed so many necessitous ones to perish of hunger? Since thou hadst gold, thou shouldst provide for their needs. Why have so many captives been sold at auction, or put to death, failing their ransom? It were better to preserve these living vessels than vessels of metal.' There could be no answer to that. Could we say: 'I feared to leave the Temple of God without ornament.' But the Sacraments do not require vessels of gold. It is not from gold that that which cannot be bought with gold takes its value. The adornment of the holy ceremonies is the ransom of captives. They are the truly precious vessels which redeem souls from death. . . . What a grand thing it is to be able to say, when a crowd of captives are ransomed: 'It is Christ who has ransomed those people! . . . The best way to employ the gold of the Redeemer is to use it for the redemption of those who are in peril. . . .' " ²⁸

But with his usual good sense, St. Ambrose regulates the exercise of the virtue he recom-

²⁸ *De Off.*, II, xxviii, 136 (*P. L.*, xvi, 148).

mends, and puts his priests on their guard against certain abuses of mendicancy:

“It is clear that liberality should have limits, in order that it be not exercised to pure loss. . . . Never were there so many beggars as to-day. We see coming to us strong, hearty fellows, who have no other title but their vagrancy, and who claim the right to despoil the poor of what they earn, and empty their purses. A little does not satisfy them; they must have more. They trick themselves out in a way to render their demands more urgent, and make up false descriptions of their social condition in order to swell the gifts they receive. To give credence too benevolently to their stories means to exhaust in a short time the alms set aside for the subsistence of the poor. There must be, therefore, a limit. Let them not go away empty handed, but let not he who helps the needy to live become the prey of schemers. Let us not be inhumane, but let us not deprive extreme indigence of all support.”²⁹

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The *De Officiis* of St. Ambrose is undoubtedly far from being a perfect work. The composition is not sufficiently even, there is inequality in its setting forth, and it is weighed

²⁹ *De Off.*, II, xvi, 76.

down by an excess of quotations from S. Scripture. Certain concepts of the author are rather wanting in precision,³⁰ and we should have liked to find the developments more illuminating, substantial, and vigorous. But notwithstanding its defects, this treatise will always command the attention of the historians of human thought. For nowhere else shall we grasp how the chief doctrines of Christianity, —belief in a Providence, faith in Jesus Christ, a firm hope in the immortality of the soul and reward beyond the grave,—have taken the place of many a moral problem.

In the second half of the XIXth century there was a school of learned humanists³¹ who worked hard to prove that, far from having breathed a new soul into humanity, Christian-

³⁰ For example St. Ambrose sometimes celebrates virtue after the Stoic manner, as if *from the beginning of the world* nothing was wanting to the wise man, that is, to the virtuous. (See *De Off.*, III, iii, 8; II, v, 18; II, xiv, 66). Then the transcendental notion makes its reappearance: virtue was no longer the supreme good in itself, but the means to arrive at the supreme good, that is, life eternal. He was not always able to weld together the different elements that presented themselves to his mind.

³¹ Denis, Maury, Ernest Havet (*Le Christianisme et ses Origines*, 1871); see the preface to Vol. I; Vol. II, pp. 291 and 300; Vol. IV, p. 413.

ity accomplished little more than to complete an evolution which had begun in the philosophical schools long before. They frequently made the objection that all the ideas described as Christian were to be found in the old philosophies, but that philosophy had not been able to communicate to them the spark of life, the inner force necessary to propagate them. But the best way to avoid superficial similarities and to realize more precisely what is specifically Christian is to determine as accurately as possible the exact difference in each moral idea between the Christian and the pagan point of view, by examining the *nuances* very closely. If this method is practised with Cicero's *De Officiis* and St. Ambrose's treatise on the same subject, it will be found to be particularly fruitful.

But while in St. Ambrose Christian moral doctrine proclaimed its originality, it assimilated all that was excellent in pagan ethics. Two civilizations,—hostile to each other on many points,—were moulded together and associated. It is in consequence of this fusion that so many who live outside the Christian pale can nevertheless accept the fundamental

notions of morality which the Church proposes, inasmuch as it includes the legacy of the past. "If we are Christians," Camille Jullian declared in connection with Thamin's study on St. Augustine,³² "if we must hold to this designation as to a formula of salvation, it is because it represents, together with all the visions which the Man of Galilee gave to the consciousness of mankind, all the lessons which the philosophers of antiquity had left there; it is because, far from being in opposition to the past, Christianity has completed and crowned it."

THE TREATISES ON VIRGINITY

The treatises on virginity present us with a particular aspect of St. Ambrose's moral teaching, and make us understand one of his favourite forms of propaganda among the faithful.

We know that his preaching on the excellence of this virtue obtained extraordinary success and spread abroad throughout the West the vogue of asceticism. Young girls came from Placentia, Bologna, even from Maure-

³² *Revue Historique*, Vol. LX, p. 342 (1896).

tania, to take the veil at Milan.³³ These writings were the outcome of sermons delivered in honour of virginity, and certain details here and there betray their origin, as, for example, allusions to the saint of the day,³⁴ or the more or less romantic stories which preachers like to scatter through their discourses with a view to facilitate their argument and distract their congregation.³⁵

The first in date, *De Virginibus*, goes back probably to the year 377. St. Ambrose says that he was *nondum triennalis sacerdos* when he wrote it. Now he was consecrated bishop at the end of 374, or the beginning of 375. The work, which comprises three parts, is addressed to his sister Marcellina, who had her-

³³ Cf. *De Virginibus*, I, x, 57 sq. (*P. L.*, xvi, 216).

³⁴ Cf. *De Virginibus*, I, ii, 5.

³⁵ Thus in Book II of the *De Virginibus*, iv, 22 sq. (*P. L.*, xvi, 224), St. Ambrose relates the story of a young maiden who in the days of persecution was condemned by the judge to be shut up in a *lupanar* for refusing to apostatise. A soldier came to her, and, far from taking advantage of her, provided her with means of escape by exchanging clothes with her. He was condemned to death for this deception. But the girl ran to the place of punishment, disputed with her deliverer his right to die in place of her, and finally both were martyred together. This story, with its rhetoric and antitheses, is a kind of high-flown and edifying Christian romance.

self made profession of virginity, was associated in the work of her brother, and had become the spiritual directress of some young girls who had embraced the religious state. Soon afterwards appeared the *De Virginitate*, which was especially written to answer the objections aroused by the *De Virginibus*; and the *De Viduis*, wherein the Bishop addressed himself exclusively to widows. Thirteen or fourteen years later, in 391, St. Ambrose returned to this subject, so dear to his heart. Eusebius, Bishop of Bologna, after the death of his daughter-in-law had entrusted his grandchildren to St. Ambrose. One of these, a young girl named Ambrosia, decided to take the veil. On the occasion of her investiture St. Ambrose wrote the *De Institutione Virginis*, in which he included the sermon he had delivered. The first portion of the work is polemical in character; he defends the virginity of Mary against the errors of Bonosus, the Metropolitan of Sardica (Sofia). Lastly, there is the *Exhortatio Virginitatis*, issued in 393, which is nothing more than a sermon preached at Florence by St. Ambrose on the occasion of the consecration of the church of the martyrs Vitalis and Agricola.

From these writings emerge some leading ideas which I will endeavour to set forth, with quotations from the principal passages.

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We cannot say that the preference shown by St. Ambrose for the state of virginity proceeded from any hostility in principle to marriage. The councils had multiplied anathemas against the systematic decriers of marriage, who believed they were defending authentic tradition by declaring the marriage relation to be execrable; and besides, the practical common sense of St. Ambrose preserved him from those exaggerations of language whereby St. Jerome, without departing from the strict limits of orthodoxy, discouraged so many excellent souls ³⁶ a few years later.³⁷

St. Ambrose was not one of those intemperate moralists who wished to make the ideal obligatory on all. This he explained on different occasions with a clearness which had no ambiguity: "People will say to me: 'Do you then deprecate marriage?' 'Not I; I favour

³⁶ See Jerome, *Ep.*, xlvi and xlix.

³⁷ The *Contra Iovinianum* dates from 392-393.

it, and condemn those who are accustomed to deprecate it. Do I not often quote the marriage of Sarah, of Rebecca, of Rachel and other women of the olden time in testimony of their exceptional virtues? He who condemns the conjugal bond, also condemns children, and thereby condemns the society of mankind as it is constituted by a series of succeeding generations. . . . Sacrilegious as they are, these men on one point at least will meet with the approval of the wise: by condemning marriage they proclaim that they ought not to have been born! I, therefore, do not deprecate marriage; I am enumerating the advantages of virginity consecrated to God. The latter state is the portion of a few; marriage is the portion of all. Virginity itself could not exist if it had not some means to be born! I am comparing good things with other good things in order the better to make stand out those which are pre-eminent.’ ” ³⁸

And again: ³⁹ “Marriage is, therefore, honourable, but still more honourable is *integritas*, for ‘he that giveth his virgin in marriage doth well; and he that giveth her not doth better’

³⁸ *De Virginibus*, I, vii, 34-35 (P. L., xvi, 209).

³⁹ *De Viduis*, xii, 72 (P. L., xvi, 269).

(1 Cor., vii, 38). We must not avoid what is good, we must choose what is better. No command is imposed, but a simple preference. That is why the Apostle very wisely says: 'Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord, but I give counsel' (*Ibid.*, 25). Where there is a command, the law is formal; where there is a counsel, grace has full play. . . . There is, therefore, no reason ⁴⁰ for avoiding the nuptial bond, as if it were a sin, but in so far as the burden is distasteful, it should be refused (*non ergo copula nuptialis quasi culpa vitanda, sed quasi necessitatis sarcina declinanda*)."

The terms in which he paraphrases the prohibition (Luke xvi, 18) to put away one's wife in order to marry another proves that St. Ambrose vividly realized the touching and beautiful nature of that *consortium omnis vitæ, divini et humani iuris communicatio*, in the words of the splendid definition of marriage given in the Roman law.

"Do not put away your wife; that would be to deny God, who is the author of your union. . . . It would be a hard thing to turn the mother out of

⁴⁰ *De Viduis*, xlii, 81 (*P. L.*, xvi, 273).

doors while she is protecting her children, and thus add to the insult done to love the wrong done to her maternal tenderness; but it would be still harder to drive away the children on account of the mother, whereas they should rather redeem the fault of their mother in the eyes of the father. What a perilous thing to expose to sin the frailty of a young woman! And what impiety to deprive of all support in her old age one who has given you the flower of her youth! . . . You put away your wife, as the law permits, without undergoing any punishment, and you think that this is lawful because the law of man does not forbid it. But the divine law does forbid it. . . . Hear the law of the Lord, which even they who made the laws obey: 'Let no man put asunder what God hath joined together.' To forget this is not only to transgress a command of Heaven, it is in some sort to undo the work of God."⁴¹

He is much more severe on the question of remarriage. In his time great minds, such as St. Gregory of Nazianzus, an unflinching observer of the *regula fidei*, still entertained some doubt as to the lawfulness of remarriage.⁴² The earlier tradition shows it was

⁴¹ *Exp. Evang. sec. Lucam*, viii, 4 (Schenkl, iv, p. 393).

⁴² *Orat.*, xxxvii, 8 (*P. G.*, xxxvi, 292). This sermon was written in 380.

held in suspicion.⁴³ St. Ambrose saw in *digamia* a mark of weakness and lack of self-control, inadequately palliated by honourable reasons, but he refused to regard it as a sin.

“It is a counsel, and not an imperative injunction that we are giving. We solicit the good will of the widow, we do not bind her. We do not forbid remarriage; but we do not recommend it (*neque enim prohibemus secundas nuptias, sed non suademus*). The consideration of human weakness is one thing, the grace of chastity is another. I will go farther: we do not forbid remarriage, but we do not approve of frequent remarriage (*plus dico: non prohibemus secundas nuptias, sed non probamus saepe repetitas*). For what is lawful is not necessarily expedient: ‘All things are lawful to me, but all things are not expedient’ (1 Cor. vi, 12).”⁴⁴

If widows wish to marry again, let them do so. But they must not make bad excuses to themselves or to others for so doing.

. . . “Do not say, ‘I have no one to lean upon.’ That is the plea of the woman who wishes to marry.

⁴³ I refer the reader to my article, “*Un Episode de l’Histoire de la Morale Chrétienne*, in the *Annales de Philosophie Chrétienne*, July, 1907, p. 383 sqq.

⁴⁴ *De Viduis*, xi, 68 (*P. L.*, xvi, 267).

Do not say, 'I am alone.' Chastity seeks solitude; the modest woman loves retirement; it is the immodest who love company. You have business matters to look after? But you can employ an agent who will manage them. You have an enemy to fear? But in the presence of the judge you will have the support of the Lord, who has said, 'Judge for the fatherless, defend the widow' (Is. i, 17). You wish to safeguard your fortune? But more important still is the heritage of modesty, and a widow can look after that better than a married woman. Has one of your slaves committed a fault? Forgive him. It is better to put up with the faults of others than to publish your own. 'Well, I simply want to marry!' You are free to do so. This wish has nothing reprehensible in itself. I do not ask for reasons; why invent them? If you think them honourable, acknowledge them. If they are somewhat unfitting, do not speak about them. But do not blame God or your relations, accusing them of having left you without support; please God your good will do not fail you as well! And do not say that you are thinking of the interests of your children, since you are about to deprive them of their mother.

"Then there are things we have the right to do which age forbids. How is a mother to make ready for her own marriage while her daughters are being married, and still more often after that? Are we to see a grown up daughter blush before the husband

of her mother ere she has blushed before her own? Yes, we have counselled you to change your garments, but not to take the nuptial veil; to leave your [husband's] grave, but not to prepare a bridal bed. What a thing for a newly married woman to have sons-in-law! How unbecoming to have children younger than one's grand-children! ⁴⁵

“ . . . What is this task that you are preparing for yourself, my daughter? Why look for stranger heirs, when you have your own? You are not desiring children, since you already have them; but you are wishful of a servitude from which you had been spared. For it is a real servitude when it is no longer adorned by a love which is henceforth exhausted, wherein the offering of virginity is no longer given, nor first youth with its grace and saintly modesty. . . . You are willing to bring forth children who shall not be the brothers of your sons, but their enemies. What else is the bringing forth of other children if it be not the spoliation of those you have already, and the taking away from them of everything—your affection and the enjoyment of your fortune?” ⁴⁶

It is, therefore, for reasons entirely in the moral order, and also from considerations of practical wisdom that St. Ambrose, by

⁴⁵ *De Viduis*, ix, 57 (*P. L.*, xvi, 265).

⁴⁶ *De Viduis*, xv, 88 (*P. L.*, xvi, 275).

very many examples from Scripture, suggests to widows a resignation which may be painful, but will be rewarded with eternal joy.

As regards the state of virginity, to his mind it was *the* Christian virtue. Doubtless it existed among the pagans, but in their case it was inspired by purely temporal motives. In Christianity alone was virginity practised from supernatural motives, and accompanied by an incomparable moral purity.

“You have heard, my daughters, what is the reward of virginity. By it a kingdom is won, a celestial kingdom peopled by angels. The vocation I am recommending to you is the most beautiful there is; it is the one that will make you as angels among mankind, and is bound by no conjugal ties. For they who do not marry, and they who do not take a wife, are like angels upon earth; they do not feel the tribulations of the flesh, they know not servitude, they are preserved from the defilement of worldly thoughts, their minds are entirely given up to divine things. As though rapt from the weakness of the body, they think not of what is of man, but of what is of God.”⁴⁷

⁴⁷ *Exhortatio Virginitatis*, iv, 19 (*P. L.*, xvi, 357).

With a view to emphasizing the privileges of virginity St. Ambrose ridicules the luxury exhibited by immodest women who painted and enamelled their faces, thereby imposing on themselves real suffering⁴⁸ by thinking to render themselves beautiful by these means.

In his desire to hasten souls into the life of renunciation he does not hesitate to lay stress on the worries accompanying the married state.

“What a pitiful condition is that of a young girl who is to be married! Like a slave whom they wish to sell she is put up at auction, and the highest bidder has her! More tolerable even is the lot of slaves; *they* can often choose their masters. But if the young girl makes her own choice, it is regarded as a crime; if she does not, as an insult!”⁴⁹

He also depicts the sadness of parents who deliver up their daughters, instead of keeping them for themselves; the sufferings of the wife who undergoes the strains of maternity, the thralldom of married life, the unceasing cares which children bring in their train.⁵⁰ Quite

⁴⁸ *De Virginibus*, I, vi, 28 (*P. L.*, xvi, 207).

⁴⁹ *De Virginibus*, I, ix, 56 (*P. L.*, xvi, 215).

⁵⁰ *De Virginibus*, I, vi, 25, 26, 30; *Exhortatio Virginitatis*, 20.

other is the lot of the virgin. In exchange for the easy sacrifice to which she consents, she receives the gift of mystical marriage with Christ. 'You offer me a bridegroom: I have found a better! (*Sponsum offertis: meliorem reperi*),'⁵¹ she may exclaim, like the young girl whose story St. Ambrose is relating, who had taken refuge in front of the altar when summoned by her parents to be married. "*Hostia pudoris, victima castitatis*,"⁵² she consummated in her own person the sacrifice most agreeable to God. She imitated the life of the angels, the prelude to that condition which the resurrection of the body will inaugurate.⁵³

It was, therefore, her duty to surmount valiantly the many obstacles opposing her vocation, and especially those which the unwillingness of her relations might cause.

"The parents say no; but they are willing to be convinced. They resist at first, because they are afraid to believe it. It frequently happens that they are indignant at your learning how to conquer. They threaten to disinherit you, to see if you are capable of disregarding a temporal loss. They provide

⁵¹ *De Virginibus*, I, xi, 65 (*P. L.*, xvi, 218).

⁵² *De Virginibus*, *ibid.*

⁵³ *De Virginitate*, vi, 27 (*P. L.*, xvi, 286).

you with a thousand delightful distractions to try the soothing effect of pleasure on you. This pressure they bring to bear, O Virgin, is a good test for you. They are the first struggles which all these restless wishes of your parents bring upon you. Triumph first, young maiden, over your filial affection. If you overcome your family, you overcome the world (*vince prius, puella, pietatem. Si vincis domum, vincis saeculum*).”⁵⁴

The rules given by St. Ambrose for testing vocations and for determining the lawful age at which they may be recognized as valid, are as wide as possible. Taking warning from certain abuses, the Church, later on, was forced to define them more strictly.⁵⁵

“It is commonly said that virgins ought not to take the veil until they have reached a certain maturity. Certainly I do not deny that a priest should exercise care not to clothe a young girl with the veil without due prudence. Yes, he should take her

⁵⁴ *De Virginibus*, I, xi, 83 (*P. L.*, xvi, 217).

⁵⁵ No general law, that is, none applicable to the whole Church, fixing the legal age for religious profession, seems to have been laid down before the Council of Trent (*Sess. xv*, c. 15, *de regularibus*: 16 completed years). On the other hand we find enactments of this kind in many councils from the early days of Christianity. Cfr. Duchesne, *Orig. du Culte Chrétien*, 2nd ed., p. 407.

age into account; but the age of her faith and modesty. . . . There is no reason to refuse youth still in its first flower; the dispositions of her soul are what it is necessary to examine. There is nothing astonishing in quite a young girl making her profession to God when history teaches us that little children have known how to suffer for Him.”⁵⁶

Such outspoken axioms could not fail to provoke lively protests in Milanese society. St. Ambrose took steps to reply to them in the *De Virginitate*. Among the reasons he brings forward, the majority of which are of a moral kind, is one of an economic character, which is particularly interesting in these modern times:

“Since our preaching has begun to popularize the desire for the state of virginity, I have heard people say that the world is dying, that there is a decrease in the human population, and that marriage is being attacked. I will ask such people if there is any man who has sought for a wife and has not been able to find one? Where can we find people going to war for the possession of a virgin! Reflect that, where there is only a small number of unmarried girls, the men are in still fewer numbers, and where the practice of virginity is more prevalent, the

⁵⁶ *De Virginitate*, vii, 39-40 (*P. L.*, xvi, 289).

number of men is greater. Enquire of the Church at Alexandria, in Africa, and throughout the East, how many virgins are consecrated in those districts each year. Here [in Milan] we have fewer births of boys than there are virgins consecrated in those regions. Let those who are opposed [to these vocations] forbid married women to be chaste; would they not have more children if they were incontinent? Should none of them, therefore, remain faithful to their husband when he is on a journey, for fear of doing a wrong to the future race, or of letting the age pass by when there is a chance of her enriching it with many children? . . .”⁵⁷

Moreover, virginity was of divine institution, —that argument refuted *en bloc* all criticism in the eyes of St. Ambrose. Mary sanctioned it by her example and her patronage.⁵⁸ The cult of the Virgin Mary assumed quite a new importance with him.⁵⁹ He ends by outlining the duties suitable to virgins.⁶⁰ He recommends

⁵⁷ *De Virginitate*, vii, 35 sq. (*P. L.*, xvi, 288).

⁵⁸ Cf. *Ie Virginibus*, II, ii, 6 sq. (*P. L.*, xvi, 219); *De Institutione Virginis*, v, 32 sqq. (*P. L.*, xvi, 327); *De Exhortatione Virginitatis*, x, 70 sqq. (*P. L.*, xvi, 372).

⁵⁹ On this point see Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte*, II, 488, and Niederhuber, *Die Lehre des hl. Ambrosius vom Reiche Gottes auf Erden*, pp. 261–273 (Mainz, 1904); Hertzog in the *Rev. d'Hist. et de Litt. Rel.*, pp. 487; 504 sqq. (1907)

⁶⁰ *De Virginibus*, III, ii, 5 sq. (*P. L.*, xvi, 233).

the moderate use of wine; in their outward exterior, the preservation of a grave, modest, and gentle demeanour; the alternation of pious reading with fasting and prayer, in order to renew the fervour of their devotion by making a change.

Such are the broad lines of St. Ambrose's doctrine on marriage, re-marriage, and celibacy. He certainly contributed in large measure to give to the ideal he thus traced the value it has preserved within the bosom of Christianity, and to render the virtue he celebrated woman's special virtue *par excellence*.⁶¹ From having always spoken of woman with esteem and respect, and abstaining from those misogynist brutalities of which ecclesiastical writers have not always been sufficiently sparing,⁶² he gave additional force and persuasiveness to his propaganda. And upon the views thus set forth have come to be grafted many others which have rendered modern thought more refined, more complex and richer in *nuances* than the mind of antiquity had been

⁶¹ See M. Thamin's very charming considerations on this point in his *Saint Ambroise et la Morale Chrétienne au IV^e Siècle*, p. 355.

⁶² Cf. Mausbach's *Altchristliche und Moderne Gedanken über Frauenberuf*, pp. 39-52 (Gladbach, 1906).

before Christianity came to exercise its influence on it.⁶³

⁶³ It is also possible that the very elevated conception of woman, which the Germanic tribes seem to have possessed, may have contributed to the same result. Such, at any rate, is the view of M. Solomon Reinach (*Revue Critique*, 17th April, 1896), who refers to the passage in the *Germania* of Tacitus § 8: "*Inesse feminis sanctum aliquid et providum putant.*" Elsewhere he suggests another interpretation; *Orpheus*, p. 194 (1907).

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CHAPTER IV

SERMONS AND DOCTRINAL TREATISES

THERE is something artificial in devoting a special chapter to the sermons of St. Ambrose. As a matter of fact, if we wished to be absolutely accurate, we should have to class under this heading practically the whole of his works. We have said more than once that nearly all his writings which have come down to us, were spoken before being written out; and when they were written out, it was from St. Ambrose's desire to make his preaching known beyond the radius of his hearers at Milan, which was too limited for his liking. He put the best part of himself into his sermons and it was to them that his most fruitful influence over souls was due. "With Ambrose," writes Msgr. Baunard,¹ "for the first time in Italy, Christian eloquence, free at last to give utterance to itself, found an instrument worthy of the altered times."² A noble attitude, a grand

¹ *Histoire de Saint Ambroise*, 2nd ed., p. 80 (1872).

² For the history of the Christian sermon, see Förster, *Ambrosius, Bischof von Mailand*, p. 200 sqq.

air of authority tempered with modesty, and a something which was at once subdued and ardent, exhibited that priestly character which is a fitting prelude to a discourse, and is even more convincing than the sermon. On his own avowal he detested the tone of the rhetoricians who were then fashionable, and in this particular, as in all else, he cared only for austerity, firm discipline, and manly vigour. A sober and unaffected bearing, gestures governed by nature, but nature corrected by a judicious sense of art, were the sole accessories he called to his aid in preaching the word of God.”³ Moreover, we have the direct testimony of St. Augustine, who was a diligent hearer of Ambrose even before his conversion. “I used great zeal,” he relates in his *Confessiones*,⁴ “in listening to him preaching to the people, and his words held my attention in suspense. To tell the truth, I was not curious; I was even scornful as to the bottom of things, but the suavity of his discourse thrilled me.” The same impression, transposed into a poetic or legendary

³ Msgr. Baunard quite legitimately drew this portrait by borrowing the features whereby St. Ambrose himself, in his *De Officiis* (I, xviii, 75; I, xix, 84), characterised the exterior attitude which becomes the cleric and the Christian orator.

⁴ *Conf.*, v, 13.

form, emerges in the *Life* written by Paulinus. He relates that one day an Arian saw an angel dictating to St. Ambrose the words he was uttering in the pulpit, and that this wonderful sight converted him.⁵

It will not, therefore, be unprofitable to draw attention to the manner in which St. Ambrose understood the art of the homily, and to give a few further examples to enable us to grasp what sprang from himself, or to help us, at any rate, to catch a glimpse of it, for we know how misleading it can be to read an orator after the delivery of a discourse into which he has put all of himself and has shed a fire which we are powerless to rekindle.

ADVICE TO CONSTANTIUS, RECENTLY CONSECRATED A BISHOP, TOUCHING PASTORAL ELOQUENCE ⁶

“Holy Scripture is a sea possessing profound depths and all the mystery of prophetic enigmas

⁵ § 17: “*Is constitutus in ecclesia tractante episcopo vidit, ut ipse postmodum loquebatur, angelum ad aures episcopi tractantis loquentem, ut verba angeli populo episcopus renuntiare videretur.*”

⁶ *Ep.*, II (*P. L.*, xvi, 917). The letter is probably of the year 379.

within itself. Into this sea flow innumerable rivers, rivers of sweet and transparent water, springing from the snows which glisten unto life eternal. Scripture is likewise filled with discourses full of relish, as of honeyed rays, of sweet maxims that refresh the souls of the listeners and charm them like a spiritual beverage with the fragrance of their moral precepts. In this manner Scripture overflows in diverse ways. Herein must you drink first, then again, then always. . . . Inundate your heart with its waters; may the land which is entrusted to you be watered therefrom, and may your own domestic springs fertilise it. To read much and to understand what one reads, is to fill oneself with this water in order that, once filled, you make it do good to others. Scripture says, 'If the clouds be full, they will pour out rain upon the earth' (Eccl. xi, 3).

"Let your words be like a flood, pure and limpid; in this way moral counsels will charm the ears of the people who will be captivated by the attractiveness of your preaching and will follow you in the path in which you would lead them. But if you notice in the people, or in any one in particular, a resistance to be overcome, or a fault to be reprimanded, then put into your language a goad, the point of which the guilty will feel. . . . Let your addresses be full of good sense, . . . and, without having need of any other support, let them justify themselves, as it were, by their own weapons, allowing no word to

be idle or without its due bearing. Preaching is the instrument which keeps in check the wounds of the soul; he who rejects it shows that he despairs of his salvation. When you come across a sinner tormented by a grievous wound, employ the balm of words to soften the hardness of his heart. . . .

“Give exhortation to God’s people, implore them to abound in good works, to renounce a disorderly life, to cease to kindle the fire of their passions, not only on Sunday, but always. Let there be no fornication nor impurity among the servants of God, for we are all the servants of the immaculate Son of God . . . Instruct your people in what is good, and teach them to do it. Exhort them to flee from shameful acts, even when they think they will not be known. It is vain to be enclosed within walls, shrouded in darkness, with no witnesses, with no accomplice; we are always under the eye of a judge whom nothing deceives and to whom all our actions cry out. . . . Let no one crave for great wealth; to have a little is to have much. Poverty and riches are only words meaning to lack and to have over much. That man is not rich who is in want of anything, nor poor who lacks nothing. Let no one despise the widow, nor oppress the orphan, nor defraud his neighbour! Woe to that man whose fortune is built upon knavery! . . . Human riches should be used by us to ransom our souls, and not to lose them. . . .”

An unfailing recourse to Scripture, which should form the substance of ecclesiastical teaching, fluent and clear language (*lactea ubertas*), except in the case of a reprimand, and exhortation, the constant end in view of which should be to bring back souls to the practice of Christian virtues, were the essential points of the *technique* of sacred eloquence which St. Ambrose outlined for the use of Bishop Constantius.

We find, as we shall see, their leading features in his own sermons, especially in those possessing a "social" character, wherein he gives expression to what has been called, with slight exaggeration, his political economy. We will also give extracts from the catechism he drew up for the use of the newly baptised and from the funeral oration over his brother Satyrus.

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One of the favourite subjects of St. Ambrose's sermons was reminding the rich in vigorous language of the special duties which were incumbent on them. To quote Paulinus,⁷ his biographer, the contrast between the extreme

⁷ *Vita S. Ambrosii*, § 41.

poverty of some and the unbridled luxury of others inflicted real suffering upon him. Especially noteworthy from this point of view is his sermon on Naboth, which, in all probability dates from his early years,⁸ and in which, with an energy that reminds us of the invectives of the Roman satirists and moralists, he brands the rapacity of the rich and the oppression they laid so heavily on the poor. Pathetic stories and fervid developments abound. It would be imprudent to consider them all as being inspired directly by examples taken from his own time, or by spectacles which he had been able to observe personally as a bishop; for he drew largely upon the Homilies of St. Basil, especially his sixth on the 18th verse of the 12th chapter of St. Luke, and his seventh directed against the rich.⁹ In spite of this there is something keen, penetrating, and impassioned in his accents, revealing the sincere emotion produced in that most disinterested and upright heart by the monstrous abuses of wealth.

⁸ Most of the critics date it in the year 394; but the proofs they bring forward are not decisive.

⁹ Some similarities are given by Förster, *Ambrosius, Bischof von Mailand*, and in the references in Schenkl's ed., Part II.

THE NEVER ENDING REPETITION OF THE
STORY OF NABOTH ¹⁰

“The story of Naboth is old in point of time—yet it is repeated day by day. Where, in fact, is the rich man who does not covet each day the goods of others? Where the opulent who does not strive to drive the poor man from the lowly field which is his, and to expel the indigent from the confines of the land left to him by his fore-fathers? Who is contented with what he has? Where is the rich man who is not goaded to covetousness by the thought of his neighbour’s possessions? Is it true that only one Achab has been born? Alas! day by day Achab is born again, and never dies here below. In the place of one who dies several others spring up, and more numerous are those disposed to rob than to lose. Neither was it one Naboth only who was murdered; each day a Naboth is laid low, each day the poor man is brought to nought. In terror, a man abandons his land, the poor man goes away, taking with him his little ones, all that he loves, followed by his wife, weeping as though she were approaching the grave of her husband. And yet less keen is the grief of the woman mourning the death of her dear ones. If she has lost the companion of her life, she watches over his grave at any rate; if she has no longer her children, at least she has

¹⁰ *De Nabuthe*, I, i (Schenkl, Part II, p. 469).

not to deplore their exile, and to wail at seeing them suffering from hunger—a still worse fate than to see them die. . . .”

A PATHETIC PICTURE OF THE MISERIES
OF THE POOR ¹¹

“I have seen with my own eyes a poor man being led, nay, dragged to prison, in order to force him to pay what he had not got; I saw him putting up his children at public auction in order to gain a delay in punishment. Chance permitted him to find some one who would lend him assistance in his extremity. He returned to his own roof with his family—and found everything had been pillaged; there was nothing left for him to procure a mouthful of bread. His children were dying of hunger under his eyes. He regretted not having sold them to some master, who would have fed them. He hesitated, and then came to the decision to sell them. But a battle took place in his heart between poverty and love. Hunger urged him to give them up, nature to continue the duties of a parent towards them. Quite ready to die with his children rather than be separated from them, he went forward, then drew back. But in spite of his desire, necessity triumphed, and love was overcome. . . .” ¹²

¹¹ *Ibid.*, v, 21 (Schenkl, ii, p. 478).

¹² I recommend the reading of the section that follows (22), in which St. Ambrose depicts the perplexity of the father ask-

In the eyes of St. Ambrose the culpable egotism of some proceeded from an unbridled desire for enjoyment, and the giving to pride and vanity the satisfactions for which they were greedy, even at the price of the misfortune of the humble.

“ . . . And you, rich men, consider it as a personal injury for a poor man to have anything which seems worth the trouble for a rich man to seize. You imagine that everything possessed by others has been taken from you. . . . Nevertheless this universe was created for all, and notwithstanding your small numbers, you claim it for yourselves with obstinate determination. For it is not only the earth, but even the sky, the air, and the sea, the use of which a mere handful of rich people wish to appropriate.”¹³

In another place he asks:¹⁴ “Does not your very palace suggest to you some shame, to you who, by keeping on building, are determined to exhaust your riches and yet never reach

ing himself which of his two sons he shall sell first. It is a finished specimen of rhetoric, revealing to what extent St. Ambrose had in his blood the sense of early discipline.

¹³ *Ibid.*, iii, ii (Schenkl, ii, p. 473).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, xiii, 56 (Schenkl, ii, p. 500).

that point? You cover your walls, yet leave human beings naked. The poor man bereft of clothing cries out, and your sole concern is to ascertain what marble to use for your mosaics. He asks for a trifle and obtains nothing. He begs for bread, yet *your* horse champs with its teeth a golden bit. . . . A multitude of people is suffering from hunger, and *you* shut your granaries. A whole mass of people groan, and *you*,—you flaunt your glittering rings. Unhappy that you are, it only rests with you to save from death all these people, and you will not do so! Yet perhaps the precious stone from your ring would have sufficed for that. . . .”

SPECULATORS AND USURERS

The wrath of St. Ambrose was especially directed against the monopolists, whose shameless speculations were the cause of general poverty. From the time that he wrote his *De Officiis* he had been drawing attention to the iniquity of these promoters of famine.¹⁵

“A truly pious man refuses to mix himself up

¹⁵ See also *De Nabuthe*, vii, 33 (Schenkl, p. 485).

with trafficking, for to seek to increase his profits is not a result of simplicity, but of cunning. It is written: 'He that hideth up corn, shall be cursed among the people' (Prov. xi, 26). You should look for the reward of your labours from the yield of a fruitful land, and from the fertility of a rich soil you should hope for a just return. Why turn into fraud the industry of nature? Why be grudging of what is necessary for all, of the produce which is brought forth for all (*publicos partus*)? Why curtail abundance to the detriment of the people? Why be desirous of scarcity? Why drive the poor to wish for barren years? Since they no longer enjoy the benefits arising from the crops when fruitful (thanks to you who hoard up the wheat and cause the price to rise), they prefer rather that the earth yield nothing than to see you speculate on public famine. You pray that there may be a scarcity of wheat in order that food may be lacking. You groan when the harvest is good, you grieve over general fertility, you deplore full granaries. You are on the watch to learn when the yield is sterile, when the harvest is wanting. You rejoice when this curse smiles upon your prayers and no one has any crops. It is then that you congratulate yourselves that *your* harvest has come, and that the misery of the public brings to you *your* riches. You adorn with the name of cleverness and ability what is nothing but calculated cunning and knavery; you call by

the name of relief what are detestable machinations. How should I label this traffic—robbery or trade? . . . Your gain is made out of the misfortunes of the public.”¹⁶

With no less virulence St. Ambrose brands usury, which he does not distinguish from lending at interest.¹⁷ He only excuses it when an enemy is the victim: “*Cui merito nocere desideras, cui iure inferuntur arma, huic legitime indicantur usuræ.*”¹⁸ But it was a criminal thing to inflict it on a Christian or a Roman. Such nevertheless was the principal source of income of a large number of people, whose trickery and cruelty St. Ambrose was at such pains to denounce, especially in the *De Tobia*.

“And these then are your good deeds, ye rich: You give less and exact more. Your humanity consists in robbing at the very moment when you are

¹⁶ *De Officiis*, III, vi, 37 and 41.

¹⁷ This distinction was never clearly made by the ecclesiastical writers of the first centuries. See the passages in Seipel, *Die Wirtschaftsethischen Lehren der Kirchenväter*, pp. 162 sqq. (Vienna, 1907). A keen but often unfair criticism of the political economy of the “Fathers” will be found in L. Brentano, *Die Wirtschaftlichen Lehren des Christlichen Altertums*, pp. 141–193 (1902).

¹⁸ *De Tobia*, xv, 51 (Schenk1, ii, 548).

lending assistance. Even the poor man becomes a source of profit. Your exactions extort from the unhappy man, crushed down by usury, the payment of his debt, and he has nothing left for himself. How merciful you are! You deliver him from one creditor only to enslave him to yourself. He needs must pay your usurious interest, when he has not even the means to support himself! He requires a remedy and you offer him poison. He asks for bread, and you hold over him a sword. He implores for liberty, and you make him your slave. He entreats to be delivered, and you draw still closer together the bonds which are strangling him.”¹⁹

THE VANITY OF RICHES

At the root of all this rapacity St. Ambrose perceived an error of judgment, a false estimate of the benefit of money and of the happiness which it is capable of procuring.

“Is not the amassing of wealth a vain enterprise?—For it is a vain thing to seek after perishable goods. After heaping them up, do you know whether you will be able to enjoy them? Is it not vanity for a merchant to travel by day and by night in order to pile up heaps of gold, to accumulate merchandise, to bargain over prices, fearful lest he sell for less

¹⁹ *De Tobia*, iii, 11 (Schenkl, ii, 523).

than he has bought, to be always watching the prices of the different markets,—and all this to draw upon himself, by the very notoriety of his trading, the attacks of robbers, or to become the victim of a shipwreck from not having waited for the return of more favourable winds in his eagerness for gain? . . . Why vainly weave a useless and unprofitable spider's web, and hang up your superfluous riches like the threads thereof? They trickle away to no purpose, they serve no end. What shall I say? They blot out in you the image of God and substitute in its place the image of the world.”²⁰

Again he writes:²¹ “Thus riches bring no help in obtaining a happy life. This is what the Lord clearly taught in the Gospel when He said, ‘Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are ye that hunger now: for you shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for you shall laugh.’ (Luke vi, 20 sq.). Poverty, hunger, sorrow, which we regard as evils, not only are not an obstacle to a happy life, but, on the contrary, are helps to it, and that is what stands out luminously from these declarations.”

“The very things which appear to be good,

²⁰ *De Officiis*, I, xlix, 244 (*P. L.*, xvi, 101).

²¹ *De Officiis*, II, iv, 15 and 16 (*P. L.*, xvi, 114).

such as riches, full repletion, joy unmingled with sorrow, militate against happiness. The Lord teaches this clearly in the words: 'But woe to you that are rich: for you have your consolation. Woe to you that are filled: for you shall hunger! Woe to you that now laugh: for you shall mourn and weep. . . .' (Luke vi, 24 sq.)."

PRIMITIVE COMMUNISM

With a view to persuading his hearers to make up their minds to certain particularly painful privations, St. Ambrose did not hesitate to put before them principles which some people would find rash and almost dangerous, and to remind them of the conventional and arbitrary character of personal property.²²

"They [the philosophers] consider that one form of justice consists in regarding common property, that is, public property, as public, and private property as private. This sentiment is not conformable

²² We should remember that similar points of view are to be found in most of the Christian moralists of the fourth century, especially in St. John Chrysostom and St. Basil. The essential passages are collected in Seipel's above mentioned work, pp. 84 sqq.

to nature, for nature has lavished all things in common for all (*natura enim omnia omnibus in commune profudit*). God created the universe in such manner that all in common might derive their food from it, and that the earth should also be a property common to all. Nature has, therefore, given birth to a common law; it is usurpation which has produced a private law (*natura igitur ius commune generavit, usurpatio ius fecit privatum*).²³

In his sermon on Naboth, and in several of his other writings, he gives a still clearer and more vehement turn to the same doctrine:

“To what limits will you strain your insensate passions, ye rich? . . . Why do you reject one who has the same rights over nature as you (*consortem naturæ*) and claim for yourselves the right to possess nature? The earth was created for all, for rich and poor in common (*in commune omnibus, divitibus atque pauperibus, terra fundata est*). Why do you arrogate to yourselves the ownership of the soil?

“Nature knows no rich; she brings forth all men in equal poverty. . . . She creates us all alike, and alike she encloses us in the sepulchre. What more resembles one dead man than another dead man?²⁴

²³ *De Off.*, I, xxviii, (*P. L.*, xvi, 67).

²⁴ *De Nabuthe*, i, 1 (*Schenkl*, ii, 469).

"It is not from your own goods that you give largesses to the beggar; it is a portion of his own which you are restoring to him (*sed de suo reddit*). What was given for all in common, you usurp for your own benefit. The earth belongs to all, not to the rich only. You are consequently paying back a debt; do not go away and think you are making a gift to which you are not bound!"²⁵

The practical conclusion deduced by St. Ambrose from these outspoken injunctions, was that all Christians are in duty bound to cast far away from them the *cupiditas acquirendi*, and that the rich especially must give liberally in order to repair the apparent injustice which makes life so pleasant for some and so bitter and difficult for others. But nowhere does he attempt to overturn the social state, or to counsel the re-establishment at any cost of this "natural law" which successive usurpation had deformed. He abstains from all revolutionary demands, and thereby keeps in line with the great Christian moralists (including St. Paul), who, while too clearsighted to deceive themselves as to the real value of certain social fictions, were too

²⁵ *Ibid.*, xii, 53 (Schenkl, ii, p. 498).

idealistic to allow covetousness to be aroused in them. "The Church from her first hour," M. Puech justly says,²⁶ "showed her intention, I will not say to consecrate, I will not say even to respect, but to tolerate the established order of things. She does not respect it, for at bottom she combats it with all her strength; but she only combats it by a propaganda of her mind; she does not admit any social claims; if she did so, she would be ruining her principles by her own act, she would be driving out egoism by one door in order to let it in by another. Christianity is no obstacle to possible or just reforms; the spirit which is in her, consisting entirely of fraternity and sacrifice, is very well suited to encourage such reforms by leading to their preparation without stirring up anger, and to their acceptance without rancour: she does not go so far as to provoke them."

ST. AMBROSE'S CATECHISMS

Though closely connected in subject, the *De Mysteriis* and the *De Sacramentis* are far from offering us the same guarantees of

²⁶ *Religions et Sociétés*, p. 106 (Paris, 1906).

authenticity. Modern critics²⁷ agree with the Benedictines²⁸ in denying the Ambrosian authorship of the *De Sacramentis*. On the other hand, the authenticity of the *De Mysteriis* is hardly any longer in doubt. The sources from which the author of this *opusculum* derives his views—namely the writings of Cyril of Jerusalem and Didymus—are those most favoured by St. Ambrose. Certain developments will be found given in a form which does not appreciably differ from those in other works which were certainly written by him.²⁹

In fact the style, the use of texts from Scripture, and the general character of composition are very much in the manner of St. Ambrose.

In spite of its wearisome paraphrases of texts from the Bible, the *De Mysteriis* is sufficiently curious to be worth translating almost in its entirety. St. Ambrose is addressing the catechumens who had already received Bap-

²⁷ Th. Förster, *Ambrosius, Bischof von Mailand*, p. 96; Ihm, *Studia Ambrosiana*, p. 72; Schermann in the *Römische Quartalschrift*, Vol. XVII (1903), p. 254; De Puniet, in the *Dict. d'Archéol. Chr. et de Liturgie*, art. xiii, col. 319 (1907).

²⁸ Cfr. *P. L.*, xvi, 427 sq.

²⁹ Cf. *De Myst.*, iii, 16–18, and the *Expos. Evang. Luc.*, iv, 49 sqq. (Schenkl, Part IV, p. 162); *De Myst.*, vii, 34–35, and *Apologia Proph. David*, xii, 59 (Schenkl, Part II, p. 340); *De Myst.*, vii, 38, and *Expos. in Ps.*, CXVIII, xvi, 22, etc.

tism and the Eucharist. He had not wished to give them any special instructions while they were passing through their course of the "mysteries," in order to leave their souls in full contact with the emotions accompanying this progressive initiation.³⁰ But now that the different ceremonies had been enacted and the catechumens had their minds still full of them, St. Ambrose undertook to explain to them the meaning of the rites which had been performed before them, and to remind them at the same time of the important bearing of the engagements they had contracted. He knew that our feeble human intelligence has difficulty in piercing through the outward appearances of things so as to recognise the essential verities under their veils. He, therefore, took pains to anticipate objections and doubts arising from a common sense which might be too short-sighted and too exclusively bound to the outside of things.³¹ In reality nothing they had witnessed was indifferent, everything had a mysterious meaning and efficacy; everything was an instrument of that moral regeneration prefigured by so many passages of the Bible,

³⁰ Cfr. i, 2.

³¹ See iii, 15; iv, 19; v, 27; viii, 44; ix, 50, 59, etc.

the recollection and benefit of which the newly-baptised should always treasure and never impart to the profane.

I.—1. "We have been discussing³² daily moral questions, the matter for which has been provided by the great deeds of the Patriarchs and the precepts in the Psalms. Our object has been to fashion and instruct you by these examples, in order that you may accustom yourselves to enter upon the path of our ancestors, to walk in their footsteps, and to obey the divine oracles, so that, once you have been received in baptism, you may observe the fitting way of life incumbent upon those who have been washed (*ablutos*)."

2. "The moment has now come to speak to you of the mysteries and to give an account of the Sacraments. If we had thought it right to unveil them to you before you had been baptised and when you were still uninitiated, that would have been,—not a revelation, but rather a betrayal. Moreover, the light of the mysteries shines out far more clearly when one has not been previously informed than when preliminary explanations have anticipated it."

3. "Open then your ears, breathe in the good odour of eternal life, the perfume of which comes

³² I am following the text of *P. L.*, xvi, 405.

to us by means of the Sacraments. That is what we impressed upon you when, discussing the opening mystery, we said '*Epheta*,' which is, 'Be thou opened' (Mark vii, 34), in order that all who wished to approach grace might know what was demanded of them, and should remember what answer they gave. As we have read in the Gospel, Christ celebrated this mystery when he healed the man who was deaf and dumb. But He touched his mouth,³³ because He was healing one who was deaf and dumb, who was also a man; it was therefore necessary to open his mouth in order to cause the sound of his voice to come out from it; and, moreover, the touching of the mouth was quite suitable in the case of a man, but it would have given offence had there been question of a woman."

II.—5. "The doors of the Holy of Holies are open to you now. You have entered into the Sanctuary of Regeneration. Recall what has been asked of you, and the reply you have made. You renounced the devil and his works, the world and its luxuries and pleasures. Your words are preserved, not in the tomb of the dead, but in the book of the living.

6. "You have seen the Levite, you have seen the priest, you have seen the high priest. Do not consider

³³ And not the ears and nostrils, as in the rite of which St. Ambrose was speaking. This rite is more fully described in the *De Sacramentis*, § 1 sq. (*P. L.*, xvi, 435). Cfr. Duchesne, *Origines du Culte Chrétien*, 2nd ed., 1898, p. 292.

the outward appearance of things, but the grace latent in the mysteries. You have spoken in the presence of angels, as it is written, 'For the lips of the priest shall keep knowledge, and they shall seek the law at his mouth: because he is the angel of the Lord of hosts' (Malach. ii, 7). Here there is room neither for error nor for negation. He who proclaims the Kingdom of Christ and life eternal, is the angel. Esteem him not for his outward appearance, but for the function which he owns. Consider what he has transmitted, measure the usefulness of his office, and recognise who he is.

7. "You have entered, therefore, in a way which enables you to have a good view of your adversary, so as to spit in his face whilst renouncing him. After which you turned towards the East.³⁴ For he who renounces the devil turns towards Christ and looks at Him face to face."

III.—8. "What did you see? Water, doubtless, but not water alone. You also saw the Levites serving, and the high priest questioning and consecrat-

³⁴ "*Cui renuntiando in os sputares.*" This is the ingenious correction made by Dom Morin (*Rev. Bénéd.*, p. 414, 1899); the MSS. have: "*cui renuntiandum in os putares*" (or "*putaris*"; only one has "*sputaris*"). This was the rite of spitting, traces of which are found in the Greek Church. The catechumen spat in the face of the devil, who was reputed to hide in the West. See, however, the article *Baptême* in the *Dict. d'Arch. Chrét. et de Liturgie*, col. 321, and *Berl. Philol. Wochenschrift*, 1910, pp. 286 and 477.

ing. In the first place the Apostle teaches you: 'We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal' (2 Cor. iv, 18). Elsewhere we read: 'For the invisible things of God, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made; his eternal power also and divinity. . . .' (Rom. i, 20). That is why the Lord Himself said: 'If you do not believe in me, believe in my works' (cfr. John x, 38). How could you believe in the operation without believing in the presence? Whence could the operation proceed if the presence had not preceded it?

9. "Consider on the other hand the antiquity of this mystery. It was prefigured at the beginning of the world. In the beginning, when God created Heaven and earth, the spirit of God moved over the waters (Gen. 1, 2). And as it moved over the waters, could it fail to exert an action on them? . . . Know that this action was exercised from the time of the creation of the world, since the Prophet tells you: 'By the word of the Lord the heavens were established, and all the power of them by the spirit of his mouth' (Ps. xxxii, 6). A twofold testimony, therefore, assures us that it moved in this manner and that it exercised an action. Moses tells us that it moved thus, and David bears witness to us that it exercised an action.

10. "There is still another testimony. All flesh having been corrupted through its own iniquities, the Lord said: 'My spirit shall not remain in man for ever, because he is flesh' (Gen. vi, 3). By these words God reveals to us that the impurities of the flesh and the defilement of grievous sins put to flight spiritual grace. Wishing to make up for this absence, God caused the Deluge and ordered Noë, the just, to go up into the ark. As soon as the waters began to abate, Noë sent forth a raven, which did not come back. He then sent forth a dove, which, as we read, came back carrying a branch of an olive tree (Gen. viii, 7-8). You see the water, you see the wood (of the ark), you see the dove,—and do you doubt the mystery?

11. "Water is, therefore, the element into which the flesh is plunged in order to wash it from carnal sin. In it all perverseness is swallowed up. On this wood the Lord Jesus was fastened when He suffered for us. It was in the figure of a dove that the Holy Spirit descended, as you have learnt in the New Testament (Matth. iii, 16), the Spirit which breathes peace and moral tranquillity into the soul. The raven is the figure of sin, which goes out and does not return, provided that, like the just, you know how to keep good watch.

12. "There is also a third testimony, that of the Apostle: 'For I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and

all passed through the sea. And all in Moses were baptised, in the cloud, and in the sea' (1 Cor. x, 1 and 2). Moses himself said in his song: 'Thy wind blew and the sea covered them' (Exod. xv, 10). You notice that holy Baptism was already prefigured in the passage of the Hebrews when the Egyptian perished, while the Hebrew escaped. What lesson does this Sacrament teach us to-day, if not that sin is swallowed up and error blotted out, while piety and innocence remain safe?

13. "You thus understand: our fathers were under the cloud, a cloud bringing a blessing, which cools the fire of carnal passions and overshadows those visited by the Holy Spirit. It stopped over the Virgin Mary and the virtue of the Most High covered her with its shadow (Luke i, 35), when she was to bring forth redemption for the human race. And this miracle was realised in a figure by Moses (Exod. xiv, 21). If, then, the Holy Spirit was present in a figure, is He not present in reality, since Scripture tells you: 'For the law was given by Moses, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ' (John i, 17).

14. "Mara was a very bitter spring of water. Moses cast into it a piece of wood and the water became sweet (Exod. xv, 23). So that without the sacred words brought about by the cross, water is useless for future salvation. But once it has been consecrated by the mystery of this saving cross, it becomes the fitting medium to be employed for spirit-

ual baptism and for the cup of salvation. Thus, as Moses, the Prophet, threw a piece of wood into this spring of water, so the priest casts over this water the preaching of the cross of the Lord, and the water becomes sweet to receive grace.

15. "Do not then believe solely with the eyes of the body. What one does *not see*, one sees far better: for [what one sees] is temporal, but what the eyes do not reach, what the soul and the mind alone discern, that is eternal.

16. "Take a lesson also from the passage in the fourth Book of Kings which has been read (4 Kings v, 1 sq.). Naaman was a Syrian suffering from leprosy, which no remedy could cure. A little maid, from among those who had been made captive, said to him that there was a prophet in Israel who would be able to cure him. He therefore took gold and silver and went away to seek the King of Israel. When the latter knew the reason of his visit, he rent his garments, crying out that it was tempting him to request of him things which depended not upon royal authority. Then Eliseus begged the King to send the Syrian to him, for that he [Naaman] saw well that God was in Israel. When he had come, Eliseus directed him to plunge seven times into the Jordan.

17. "Naaman reflected that in his own country there were better rivers than the one before him and that he had plunged into them in vain, and had

never succeeded in getting rid of his leprosy. The recollection of this held him back from obeying the commands of the prophet. However, in the end he yielded to the advice and the exhortations of his servants, and bathed. At once he was made clean, and he then understood that it was not the water, but grace that had cleansed him.

18. "Now learn who was this little maid from among the captives. It is the group of Gentiles, that is the Church of the Lord, oppressed and held captive by sin so long as they had not yet the liberty given by grace; who made the foolish people of the nations hear the words of the prophet, which for so long a time before they had held in doubt. When they recognised that they must obey, they were washed from the defilement of their vices. But you are already healed, and that is why you should have no doubt.

IV. 19.³⁵ "This foreshadowing was given in order that you should not have faith only in what you see, nor say, 'Is this then the great mystery that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man' (1 Cor. ii, 9)? I see water such as I have seen every day. Is that to cure me? I have often gone down into it, but I have never

³⁵ Schermann (*Röm. Quartalsch.*, 1902, p. 242) thinks that St. Ambrose made use of St. Cyril's Homily *In Paralyticum* for this chapter.

been cured. Know ye now that water does not heal without the Spirit.

20. "That is why you read that in Baptism there are three witnesses that give testimony, water, blood, and the Spirit, which together make up one whole (cfr. 1 John v, 8); for if you do away with one of them, there is no Sacrament of Baptism. For what is water without the cross of Christ? An element in general use, bereft of sacramental virtue. But without water there is no mystery of regeneration. 'Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God' (John iii, 5). The catechumen has faith also in the cross of the Lord Jesus, of which he has himself received the mark, but if he be not baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, he cannot receive pardon for his sins, nor obtain the benefit of spiritual grace.

21. "And so under the dispensation of the law, this Syrian plunged in three times; 'you have been baptized in the name of the Trinity, you have confessed the Father; remember what you did; you have confessed the Son, you have confessed the Holy Ghost. Note well the order of these things in the faith: you are dead to the world and you are raised to life again for God. You were in a manner buried in this element of the world, you were dead on account of sin, and you were raised to life again

to have life eternal. Be very sure, then, that in this there was not purely and simply water.

22. "See now why Scripture tells you: 'An angel of the Lord descended at certain times into the pond: and the water was moved. And he that went down first into the pond, after the motion of the water, was made whole of whatever infirmity he lay under' (John v, 4). This pool was at Jerusalem: in it a sick person was made whole every year, but not before the angel had descended into it. The water was agitated to mark that the angel had descended into it: this was for the sake of the incredulous. *They* needed a sign; *your* faith is enough for you. An angel descended for them; for you it is the Holy Ghost who descends. For them, the creature [water] was agitated; for you, Christ Himself, the Lord of all creatures, exercises His action.

23. "One such person only was healed then; now it is all, or more correctly, only Christians that can be. For there are some among them for whom the very water is delusive (cfr. Jer. xv, 18). The Baptism of those who have no faith does not make whole, it does not cleanse, it defiles.³⁶ The Jew washed the vessels and the cups (cfr. Mark vii, 3) as though

³⁶ St. Ambrose seems to mean here that Baptism administered by heretics is inefficacious. This point of view had been almost abandoned in the Western Church. But in the East many churches rejected the validity of Baptism conferred by heretics. Cfr. Basil, *Ep. Can.*, xlvii (*P. G.*, xxxii, 732).

senseless objects were capable of sinning or receiving grace. Do you wash the living vessel that you are, in order that your good actions may shine forth in it and that the splendour of your state of grace may glow therein. This pool was therefore a figure destined to show you that it is the power of God which descends into this living spring.

24. "See again the paralytic who was waiting for some man (cfr. John v, 7). Who was this man, if not the Lord Jesus, born of the Virgin, at whose coming it was no longer the shadow that was to heal the sick one by one, but the true reality that was to cure all at once? It was He, then, for whose coming the sick man was waiting, He of whom God spoke to John the Baptist: 'He upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining upon him, he it is that baptizeth with the Holy Ghost' (John i, 33). Again it was of Him that John gave testimony: 'I saw the Spirit coming down as a dove from heaven, and he remained upon him' (*Ibid.*, verse 32). Why did the Spirit descend in the form of a dove unless to make you see and recognise that the dove which Noë, the just, sent out of the ark was a figure of this dove, and to make you grasp the *type* of the Sacrament?

25. "Perhaps you will object: 'Since it was a real dove which Noë sent out, and the Spirit descended *like* a dove, how can we say that in the first case it was a figure, but in the second a reality? Is it not

written in the Greek that the Spirit descended in the form of a dove (cfr. Luke iii, 22)?” But is there anything as real as the Divinity which subsists eternally? The creature, on the contrary, cannot be a reality: it is only an appearance, which can be dissolved, and without difficulty is transformed. See, too, that the simplicity of those who are baptized must not be apparent, but real. Hence the Lord said: ‘Be ye therefore, wise as serpents and simple as doves’ (Matth. x, 16). It was not without reason, therefore, that the Spirit descended like a dove, in order to teach us that we must have the simplicity of the dove. Do we not read that the appearance, too, should be regarded like a reality in connection with Christ: ‘Being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man’ (Phil. ii, 7); and as regards God the Father: ‘Neither have you heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape’ (John v, 37).”

V.—26. “Some doubt may still remain in your minds when the Father cries out to you so clearly in the Gospel, ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’ (Matth. iii, 17); when the Son proclaimed it also,—He over whom the Holy Ghost was manifested under the appearance of a dove, and also the Holy Ghost who descended like a dove; also David: ‘The voice of the Lord is upon the waters: the God of majesty hath thundered, the Lord upon many waters’ (Ps. xxviii, 3); lastly, when Scripture bears witness that at the prayer of the

priest of Baal fire came down from heaven (cfr. Judg. vi, 21), and again that at the prayer of Elias fire was sent and consecrated the sacrifice (3 *Kings*, xviii, 38).

27. "Do not consider the personal merit of the priests, but the office which they fill. If you consider merit, regard the priests as you would Elias. Consider, too, the merits of Peter or of Paul, who transmitted to us this mystery after having received it from the Lord Jesus. For the priests, in former days, a visible fire was sent in order that they might believe. For us, who believe, it operates invisibly. For them it was a symbol, for us it is a warning. Believe firmly then in the presence of our Lord Jesus invoked by the prayers of the priest. Did He not say: 'For where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them?' (Matth. xviii, 20). With all the more reason, therefore, where the Church is, and where His mysteries are, there He condescends to favour us with His presence.

28. "You therefore went down [into the water]. Remember the answer you gave: 'I believe in the Father, I believe in the Son, I believe in the Holy Ghost.' Which does not mean: 'I believe in a Being who is greater, in another who is less great, and in a third who is in the lowest grade.' These words, on the contrary, impose on you an identical undertaking, which is to believe in the Son precisely as

you believe in the Father, and in the Holy Ghost precisely as in the Son,—with this sole reservation that you confess that you must believe only in the cross of our Lord Jesus.

VI. 29. “After this you went up to the priest. Observe what followed: was it not what David said: ‘Like the precious ointment on the head, that ran down upon the beard, the beard of Aaron.’ (Ps. cxxxii, 21). Here we have the perfume of which Solomon spoke: ‘Thy name is as oil poured out: therefore young maidens have loved thee’ (Cant. 1, 2). How many regenerated souls loved thee on that day, O Lord Jesus, and said, ‘Draw me: we will run after thee to the odour of thy ointments’ (*ibid.*, 1, 3), to breathe the odour of thy resurrection?

30. “Understand why this is so; it is because ‘the eyes of a wise man are in his head’ (Eccles. ii, 14). This is why the ointment ran down upon his beard, meaning the graciousness of his youth; upon the beard of Aaron, in order that you might become a chosen race, sacerdotal, precious; for we are all anointed with spiritual grace, for the Kingdom of God and for the priesthood.

31. “You came up out of the [baptismal] pool. Remember the passage in the Gospel. In the Gospel our Lord Jesus washes the feet of his disciples. When it was Peter’s turn, he said: ‘Thou shalt never wash my feet’ (John xiii, 8). Peter did not understand the mystery, and that is why he refused the minis-

tration of Christ. He imagined that it would be unseemly that a humble servant should suffer his master to minister to him, without saying a word. But the Lord answered him: 'If I wash thee not, thou shalt have no part in me.' Whereat Peter cried out, 'Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head.' (*Ibid.*, xiii, 9). The Lord answered: 'He that is washed, needeth not to wash his feet, but is wholly clean.'

32. "Peter was clean, but it was necessary for him to have his feet washed, for he had in him the sin bequeathed by the first man, when the serpent deceived him and succeeded in making him sin. It was to blot out this hereditary sin that his feet were washed; it is baptism which frees us from ours.

33. "Observe at the same time that the mystery consists in the ministry of humility as well. For Christ said: 'If then I, being your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; you also ought to wash one another's feet' (John xiii, 14). If the Author of our salvation Himself has redeemed us by His obedience, how much more ought we, His humble servants, testify to our obedience by humility?

VII.—34. "You then received white robes, as a sign that you had been relieved of the outer covering of sin in order to put on the chaste veil of innocence, of which the prophet said: 'Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop, and I shall be cleansed: thou shalt wash me, and I shall be made whiter than

snow' (Ps. L, 9). In reality he who is baptized appears as purified both according to the law and the Gospel: according to the law, because Moses sprinkled the blood of a lamb with a sprig of hyssop; according to the Gospel, because the garments of Christ were white as snow when He showed forth the glory of His Resurrection in the Gospel. He, therefore, whose sins are remitted, becomes whiter than snow. Wherefore the Lord spoke by the mouth of Isaias: 'If your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow' (Is. i, 18).

35: "Having put on these garments in the laver of regeneration, the Church says in the Canticle: 'I am black but beautiful, O ye daughters of Jerusalem' (Cant. i, 4): black from the frailty of our human condition, beautiful by grace; black, because made up of sinners, beautiful by the Sacrament of faith. Beholding these garments, the daughters of Jerusalem said in their surprise: 'Who is this woman that cometh up clothed in white?' (Cfr. Cant. viii, 5). She was black; how has she suddenly become white?

36. "When Christ rose from the dead, the angels themselves doubted; the powers of Heaven doubted when they saw the flesh going up to Heaven. They cried out: 'Who is this king of glory?' (Ps. xxiii, 8). Some said: 'Lift up your gates, O ye princes and be ye lifted up, O eternal gates: and the King of glory shall enter in!' (*Ibid.*, verse 7); others on the

other hand doubted and asked: 'Who is this King of glory?'

37. "In Isaias we see that the powers of Heaven doubted, and said: 'Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bosra, this beautiful one in his robe, walking in the greatness of his strength?' (Is. lxiii, 1). But Christ, seeing His Church—for whom, as we read in the Book of Zacharias (Zach. iii, 3) he was clothed with filthy garments—adorned in white raiment, in other words, seeing the soul made clean and washed in the laver of regeneration, they cried out thereat: 'How beautiful art thou, my love, how beautiful art thou! Thy eyes are dove's eyes' (Cant. iv, 1),—those doves in the form of which the Holy Ghost descended from Heaven.

38. "And further on: 'Thy teeth as flocks of sheep that are shorn, which come up from the washing, all with twins, and there is none barren among them. Thy lips are as a scarlet lace' (Cant. iv, 2 sq.). There is no half-hearted praise here. First we have this beautiful comparison with sheep that are shorn; now we know that the goats graze without danger on the heights and seek their food in precipitous places. Then, when they are shorn, they are freed from their superfluous wool. Hence the comparison between them and the Church, who has in herself the many virtues of the souls who cast their superfluous sins into the [baptismal] font, who offer to

Christ their mystical faith and moral grace, and who speak of the cross of the Lord Jesus." . . .³⁷

42. "Remember thereafter that you have received the seal of the Spirit, the Spirit of wisdom and intelligence, the Spirit of prudence and virtue, the Spirit of knowledge and piety, the Spirit of holy fear. Keep what you have received. God the Father has laid His mark upon you; Christ our Lord has fortified you, and the Spirit has placed a pledge in your heart, as you have learnt in the passage from the Apostle (2 Cor. i, 22).

43. "The host of the purified, rich with all these adornments, presses forward to the altar of Christ, saying: 'I will go in to the altar of God, to God who giveth joy to my youth' (Ps. xlii, 4). Having laid aside the defilement of their former errors in the renewal of a youth which recalls that of the eagle, they hasten to approach this celestial repast. They arrive then, and beholding the ornaments of the most holy altar, cry aloud: 'Thou hast prepared a table before me' (Ps. xxii, 5). . . .

44. "Now pay careful attention lest any one, looking at what can be seen (for the things invisible are not seen; they elude human observation) go away and say: 'God caused manna and quails to rain down for the Jews. But for the Church which he cherishes, the things He has prepared consist of

³⁷ Here follow some further mystical paraphrases from the *Canticle of Canticles*, which I omit.

those whereof it is said that 'eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him' (1 Cor. ii, 9). In order that no one may speak thus, we will use our utmost effort to prove that the Sacraments of the Church are older than those of the Synagogue, and more remarkable than the manna.

45. "That they are older the passage from Genesis, which has been read, teaches us. In reality the Synagogue takes its origin from the Law of Moses. But Abraham was much earlier. When he had defeated his enemies, and recovered his own nephew, at the moment of his victory, Melchisedech came before him and brought presents, which he received with respect. It was not Abraham who brought them, but Melchisedech, who is represented as having no father or mother, and as having neither beginning nor end, like to the Son of God. Of him Paul said to the Hebrews that He 'continueth a priest for ever' (Hebr. vii, 3); and He it is who, in the Latin translation, is called King of Justice and of Peace.

46. "Do you not recognize who He is? Could a man, himself scarcely attaining to be just, be King of Justice? Could he be King of Peace, when he can hardly attain to be a man of peace? He [Christ] it was who, from the point of view of His Divinity, had no mother, for He was begotten by the Father, and is of the same substance; who had no father

from the point of view of the Incarnation, since He was born of a Virgin. He hath neither beginning nor end, being Himself the beginning and the end of all things, the first and the last. The Sacrament you have received is not then a gift of man, but a divine gift, brought by Him who blessed Abraham, the father of the faith, whose state of grace and acts you admire.

47. "What is proved is this: the Sacraments of the Church are older. Know now that they are to be preferred. Certainly this manna, which God caused to rain down for our fathers, this food falling from heaven on which they fed day by day, is a marvellous prodigy. Of this it is said: 'Man ate the bread of angels' (Ps. lxxvii, 25). Nevertheless, those who ate of this bread all died in the desert, while the food you receive, that living bread coming down from Heaven, provides you with the substance of eternal life, and whosoever shall eat of it shall never die: for it is the Body of Christ.

48. "See now which is the most excellent: the bread of angels or the Flesh of Christ, which is the Body of Life. The manna came from heaven; this Flesh is above heaven. The manna was from heaven, the latter is the Flesh of the Lord of Heavens. One was subject to corruption if it was kept till the following day; the other escapes all corruption, and whosoever shall taste of it, in pious disposition, shall not know corruption. For the former, water gushed

out of a rock: for you, the Blood of Christ is poured forth. That water changed them, but only for the moment; this Blood satisfies you for eternity. The Jew drinks, and thereafter is thirsty. You, when you shall have drunk, have no more thirst. In the one case it was but a shadow; here all is reality. . . .

49. "Light is to be preferred to shadow, reality to the figure, the Body of the Author of all things to the manna from heaven."

IX. 50 ³⁸ "Perhaps you will say: 'I see something else. How is it you can assure me that it is the Body of Christ that I receive?' We must now prove this point. Of what august examples shall we make use? Let us prove that here we have nothing which nature has effected, but what the words of benediction have consecrated; and also that the power of that benediction is superior to that of nature, since by the benediction nature herself is transmuted.

51. "Moses held a rod; he cast it down and it became a serpent (Exod. iv, 3-4). He then took hold of the tail of the serpent, and it was turned back into a rod. You see that by the grace residing in the prophet, nature was transmuted twice,

³⁸ In connection with this chapter see Msgr. Battifol's *Études d'Histoire et de Théologie Positive*, 2nd series, pp. 293 sqq. (Paris, 1907). Msgr. Battifol remarks that it is to St. Ambrose, among the Latins, that the distinction belongs of having placed in full light the notion of the miraculous conversion, and thereby prepared the way for the definition of Transubstantiation.

once into the serpent, and again into the rod. The rivers of Egypt ran with perfectly pure water, and we see that blood began to flow from their sources: it was impossible to drink any longer from them (cfr. Exod. vii, 20 sq.). Then, through the prayer of the prophet, the blood ceased to flow, and the water came back again. . . .

52. "We realise, therefore, that grace has greater power than nature, but up to now we have only been speaking of the grace accompanying the words of benediction uttered by the prophets. If, therefore, they had such efficacy as to be able to change nature (*ut naturam converterent*), what are we to say of that divine consecration wherein the very words of the Saviour operate? For the Sacrament which you receive becomes what it is through the words pronounced by Christ. If then, the words of Elias had such power as to cause fire to come down from heaven, shall the words of Christ be powerless to change the nature of the elements (*ut species mutent elementorum*)? You have read of the creation of the universe: 'He spoke, and they were made: he commanded, and they were created' (Ps. cxlviii, 5). Cannot the word of Christ, which had power to make out of nothing that which before did not exist, change the things that are into those which they are not (*non potest ea quæ sunt in id mutare quod non erant*)? . . .

53. "But why instance these proofs when we can

bring forward examples with which He Himself provides us, and base the truth of this mystery on the example of the Incarnation? Was it, then, in conformity to the laws of nature that our Lord Jesus was born of Mary? Those laws demand that a woman cannot conceive without a man. It was thus in opposition to those laws that a virgin brought forth. Why look for the laws of nature in the Body of Christ, since it was by transgressing those laws that the Lord Jesus Himself was brought forth by a virgin? It was the actual Flesh of Christ that was crucified, that was buried. In this we have in very truth the Sacrament of His Flesh. The Lord Jesus proclaims of Himself: 'This is my Body' (Matth, xxvi, 26). Before the sacred words of blessing, the substance He spoke of was other; after the consecration it was His own Body. He Himself speaks of *His own Blood*. Before the consecration it is called otherwise; after the consecration it is called *Blood*. And *you* say 'Amen,' that is, 'This is true.' May your innermost soul be in harmony with what your mouth utters; may your feelings conspire with the words spoken!

55. "Of such like are the Sacraments with which Christ feeds His Church and fortifies the substance of the soul; and seeing the progress of His grace, He justly tells her: 'How beautiful are thy breasts, my sister, my spouse. . . . My sister, my spouse is a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up' (Cant. iv,

10-12). By which He teaches that the mystery must remain sealed up in you in order that no culpable act, no injury to your chastity, may violate it, and in order that it may not be divulged to those who could not comprehend it, nor be spread about among unbelievers through indiscreet gossip. You must make yourself the careful guardians of your faith and be on the alert to keep your life and your discretion intact. . . .

58. "Christ is present in this Sacrament, because therein is the body of Christ. It is not, therefore, a corporeal, but a spiritual food. That is why the Apostle said concerning that which was the *type* of it: 'Our fathers did all eat the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink' (1 Cor. x, 3-4). The Body of God is, in reality, a spiritual body. The Body of Christ is the Body of the Divine Spirit, for the Spirit is Christ. . . .

59. "Now that we have received everything, let us realise that we are regenerated, and let us not say: 'How are we regenerated? Have we entered a second time into our mother's womb? Have we been born a second time? I cannot recognise in this the normal course of nature?' The reason is that here the natural order is in nowise concerned: it is the excellence of grace that reigns. Moreover, the fact of birth is not always conformable to natural laws: we confess that Christ, our Lord, was born of a

virgin, and in this we put forward a denial of these laws.

“It was not from a man that Mary conceived. She became a mother through the operation of the Holy Ghost, as Matthew says: ‘She was found with child of the Holy Ghost’ (Matth. i, 18). If, then, by coming down into the Virgin, the Holy Ghost brought about conception, if He accomplished the function of regeneration, it is not open to doubt that, coming down upon the [baptismal] water, or upon those who receive Baptism, He effectively achieves their regeneration.”

SERMONS ON THE DEATH OF SATYRUS

Tillemont and the Benedictines give the date of the *De Excessu Satyri* as 379. But in his edition of Symmachus,³⁹ Seeck drew attention to §1, 32, where St. Ambrose states that his brother, who was eager to return to Italy, was detained by Symmachus in Africa, whither he had gone to recover a considerable sum of money due to St. Ambrose. Now Symmachus was Proconsul in Africa from 373 to 374. According to this, the return of Satyrus could not have taken place before the winter of 374-

³⁹ *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, Vol. vi, Part 1, p. xlix (Berlin, 1883).

375.⁴⁰ He died most probably in September 375. And it was in this month that St. Ambrose wrote the two books *De Excessu Fratris sui Satyri*. The first book is a counterpart of the funeral oration delivered by him in the Cathedral of Milan on the day of his brother's burial. He descants on the exceptional qualities possessed by Satyrus,⁴¹ and gives vent to his grief. In the second book is given the sermon he preached seven days later before the tomb. It contains no further outpouring of memories and regrets, but a wholly philosophic consideration of the law of death, universal and beneficent, the rigour of which is so singularly tempered by the promise of the resurrection.⁴²

ST. AMBROSE ON SATYRUS⁴³

"Unavailingly I aspired to receive thy last sigh,

⁴⁰ See Rauschen, *Jahrbücher der Christlichen Kirche*, p. 475.

⁴¹ I, 51: "*Date, quæso, veniam, et permittite dolori meo, ut de eo mihi paulo uberius liceat loqui, cum quo iam non conceditur colloqui.*"

⁴² ii, 3: "*Ideo mortem non esse lugendam: primum, quia communis sit, et cunctis debita: deinde, quia nos sæculi huius absolvat aerumnis: postremo, quia somni specie ubi ab istius mundi labore requietum sit, vigor nobis vivacior refundatur.*"

⁴³ i, 19 (*P. L.*, xvi, 1352).

or in thine agony to breathe into thee my breath as though to snatch thy death from thee to myself, or to transfuse my life into thee. O those last kisses, so cruel and yet so dear! O lamentable embraces, in the midst of which I felt the stiffening of his inanimate body, and the giving forth of his last sigh! Needless for me to tighten my grasp on his arms; I had already lost him whom I was still straining to myself. . . . What can I do, now that I have lost one who was the sweetness, the comfort, the ornament of my existence? In thyself alone thou wert my consolation in the privacy of the home, my pride without. It was thou who madest decision, when I had to take a resolution, who sharedst my troubles, who keptest from me anxieties, and didst exorcise my cares. Thou madest thyself the counselor of my actions, the vindicator of my intentions. It was thanks to thee that my domestic and public worries were soothed. . . . All this I can say without saying too much, for part of thy merit lay in having managed the house of thy brother and enhanced his episcopal acts without ever offending anyone. I feel the grief my heart is going through in recalling thy services and in enumerating thy virtues. And yet this very sorrow is not without its solace. These memories, while they renew my grief, bring also something like pleasure. Could I not be thinking of thee, or think of thee without tears. . . .”

CHRISTIAN CONSOLATION ⁴⁴

“Our tears, then, shall cease, for undoubtedly there must be some difference between Christians and those who are not Christians. Let them weep who can have no hope of resurrection, whom barbarous unbelief, and not divine decree, deprives of it. Let the servers of idols grieve over the loss of their dear ones, let them consider them to be dead forever; let their tears have no respite, their mourning no repose, since in their eyes the dead, too, know no rest. For us, for whom death is the term, not of human existence, but only of this life—for nature is repairing herself for a better state—how doth nature wipe away all our tears! But if even others, who see in death the end of all sensation, and the eclipse of nature, are able to find some consolation, what ought to be our comfort, who draw from our good conscience the hope of a better reward after death? . . . Let us then make a truce to our tears, or, if they cannot cease to flow, let my lamentation blend with the universal lamentation and hide itself in the general grief. For how can I hope to dry up their source when my eyes fill each time, O my brother, when thy name is spoken, when my every act bringeth back thy memory, and my grief, its counterpart? How couldst thou be far from me,

⁴⁴ i, 70 (*P. L.*, xvi, 1369).

when so many duties render thee present to my eyes? Yes, thou art here, each moment my eye meeteth thee, I embrace thee with all my heart, I look at thee, I speak to thee, I kiss thee, I hold thee in mine arms, whether by day or in the repose of night. In the times that are past, when thou wert living, I loved not the night, which robbed me of thy presence,—but now I love that sleep which hath given thee back to me. . . .”

BELIEF IN THE RESURRECTION ⁴⁵

“Why do you doubt that from the body shall rise again the body? The grain is sown, the grain cometh to life again; the fruit falleth, the fruit cometh to life again; but the seed is clothed in the flower and is hidden in its sheath. Likewise, ‘this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality’ (1 Cor. xv, 53). The flower of the resurrection is immortality. . . . You ask yourselves in amazement how putrefaction can again become solid, how the particles once dispersed can reunite, how the corporeal elements, already dissolved, can reconstruct themselves,—and doth it not surprise you to see the seed, dissolved by the wet pressure of the earth, grow green again? . . . What is there strange in the earth giving up the human bodies it hath received when she vivifies, causes to spring up,

⁴⁵ ii, 54 sqq. (*P. L.*, xvi, 1387).

reclathes, protects and guards the seeds laid within her bosom? Cease then to doubt that the earth restores faithfully the human deposit, since she multiplies with interest the seeds entrusted to her. We see the grape-stones decay, and the vine come to life again; we graft and behold the tree reborn. How can we believe that Divine Providence is concerned over trees, and hath no care for mankind? Will He who doth not permit to perish what He hath created for the use of man, suffer that man himself, made in His own image, shall be annihilated? . . . Moreover, is it difficult for God to reassemble the particles dispersed and to bring together those which are scattered? Are not the universe, the mute elements, and nature, in subjection to Him? As if it were not a far greater miracle to give life to clay than it is to reconstruct it!"

DOCTRINAL TREATISES

The funeral oration we have just been reading enables us to pass to the doctrinal treatises of St. Ambrose: the *De Fide*, *De Spiritu Sancto*, *De Incarnationis Dominicæ Sacramento*, all three relating to the Trinity, and the *De Pænitentia*.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Three other *opuscula* have been lost, the *De Sacramento Regenerationis sive de Philosophia*, to which St. Augustine

The *De Fide* was written twice. The two first books, drawn up in the year 378 at the express request of Gratian,⁴⁷ bear the earmarks of haste.⁴⁸ The general outlines of his subject are sketched rather than profoundly examined.⁴⁹ Two years later, in 380, St. Ambrose again took his treatise in hand and gave to it all the fullness which it seemed to him to merit.⁵⁰ At that period of controversy and heresies it was important to provide the young Emperor with exact notions on the Trinity. But the matter seemed to St. Ambrose to be so complex that he determined to write a special work to demonstrate the identity in essence of the Father and the Son with the Holy Ghost. The three books *De Spiritu Sancto*,

often alludes; the *Ad Pausophium Puerum*, of which his biographer Paulinus gives testimony (*Vita Ambrosii*, § 28); and the *Expositio Fidei* from which Theodoret, Bishop of Cyprus, quotes a fragment (*Eranistes sive Polymorphus Dial.*, ii). It is not certain whether the *Explanatio Symboli ad Initiandos*, published by Mai in 1833, should be attributed to St. Ambrose.

⁴⁷ Cfr. iii, i, 1,

⁴⁸ Cfr. *De Fide*, II, xv, 129: "*Haec ego, Imperator auguste, carptim ac breviter impolita magis proposui, quam enodata digessi.*"

⁴⁹ III, i, 1: "*Duos tantum conscripsi libellos, quibus vias quasdam fidei et semitas demonstrarem.*"

⁵⁰ III, i, 2: "*Ea quae perstricta paucis superius sunt, placuit mihi paulo latius exsequi.*"

likewise dedicated to Gratian, were elaborated in 381.⁵¹ In order to treat of such a difficult question St. Ambrose called to his aid the principal resources of Greek contemporary theology.⁵² We find in the *De Spiritu Sancto* the inspiration of Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Basil, Didymus of Alexandria, Gregory Nazianzen, and Epiphanius. Even before he had finished his work the provocation given by two Arian chamberlains of Gratian's court⁵³ led him to give an explanation in public of the mystery of the Incarnation. Out of this instruction arose *De Incarnationis Dominicæ Sacramento*, which seems to have been published between the *De Fide* and the *De Spiritu Sancto*.⁵⁴

It is difficult to give extracts offering any really important interest from this series of

⁵¹ The work was written after the death of Athanaric, King of the Goths, which took place on the 25th January, 381, at Constantinople (cfr. i, 17), and apparently before the death of Peter of Alexandria, in April or May of that same year (cfr. i, 18).

⁵² See Schermann, *Die Griechischen Quellen des Hl. Ambrosius in L. III De Spiritu Sancto* (Munich, 1902), comparing with it Scholz's text in the *Theologische Quartalschrift*, Vol. LXXXVII (1905), pp. 371 sqq.

⁵³ Cf. *Vita Ambrosii* by Paulinus, § 18.

⁵⁴ The *De Fide* is often quoted in it, but not the *De Spiritu Sancto*.

discussions, in which St. Ambrose follows up the arguments of the Arians in their circuitous and elusive wanderings. I will cite only one, which will give some idea of his method of argumentation.

THE KNOWLEDGE POSSESSED BY CHRIST ⁵⁵

“Every day we hear the clamour of the Arians, who allege that Christ was not possessed of all knowledge. They say it is written: ‘But of that day or hour [the coming of the Son of Man] no man knoweth, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but the Father’ (Mark xiii, 32).

“In the first place, the ancient Greek manuscripts do not give the words ‘nor the Son.’ There is nothing astonishing in their [the Arians] having falsified this passage: have they not corrupted Divine Scripture? We can well see the reason for their interpolation, which serves them to buttress their hideous sacrilege.

“But let us admit that the text is really that of the Evangelists. The name of the Son is in some way of diverse kinds. Jesus is called ‘Son of Man,’ and it may be that in this connection, by reason of the ignorance proper to the nature He had assumed,

⁵⁵ *De Fide*, v, xvi, 192 sqq. (*P. L.*, xvi, 716). To localize this passage in the development of theological doctrine, see Turmel’s *Hist. de la Théologie Positive*, Vol. I (1904), p. 44.

He appeared to be ignorant of the Day of Judgment. But how, as the Son of God, could He not have known that day, since He possessed in Himself the mysterious fullness of wisdom and divine knowledge? . . . No, He was not ignorant of that day. The wisdom of God was not of that kind which knows in part and is partially ignorant. How could *He* have been in part ignorant who made all things? To know is a lesser thing than to do. We know many things which we cannot do, and we do not all know in the same manner, but each one has his own particular point of view. Thus the peasant, the townsman, the pilot, have each his manner of knowing the action of the winds and the course of the stars. They do not know *all* about them, and yet we say that they know. He alone who created all things, knows everything fully. . . . Let us consider, therefore, why He did not wish to specify the moment [of His second coming]. We shall then see that there was no ignorance on His part, but wisdom. It was not to our advantage to know that moment. As we are ignorant of the precise moment of the judgment, we must be on our guard and avoid sinful habits. In reality it is not profitable to know the future; but it is good to fear it: 'Be not high-minded, but fear' (Rom. xi, 20).

"If Christ had expressly indicated the day, He would have seemed to be appointing the period of our discipline only for the time nearest to the judg-

ment; but during the preceding periods, the just would have become lax, and the sinner would have been in full security. The adulterer would not cease wishing to begin over again, if every day he did not fear punishment, nor would the brigand leave the deep woods wherein he dwells, if he did not know that every moment chastisement was hanging over his head. For most people impunity is a spur, and fear the checking rein. For this reason I said that there was no advantage in our knowing, but very much to the contrary, in our not knowing. Ignorance could only engender fear, and watchfulness, repentance. Has not Christ Himself said: 'Wherefore be you also ready, because at what hour you know not, the Son of Man will come' (Matth. xxiv, 44). When the soldier is informed that the battle is not imminent, he unlearns the exercises of the camp."

ROME AND CHRISTIANITY

St. Ambrose wrote the *De Fide* just when Gratian, who had been informed of the disasters being prepared for the Empire by the imprudence of Valens, was getting ready to start for the East.⁵⁶ This explains why St. Ambrose interrupted his exposition of doc-

⁵⁶ *De Fide*, i. Prol.: "*Petis a me libellum, sancte imperator, profecturus ad praelium.*"

trine at the end of the second book ⁵⁷ for a short space, in order to express to the Emperor his earnest wishes for his victory and to emphasise the solidarity henceforth established between the Christian religion and the destinies of the Roman Empire. The following is this "war song, pious as well as patriotic:" ⁵⁸

"I would not further detain you, O Emperor, when your thoughts are occupied with war and you are preparing trophies of victory over the barbarians. March with the buckler of faith against your breast and the sword of the Spirit in your hand. March to that victory which long ago was promised to you, and which the divine oracles foretell. Did not Ezechiel, in fact, prophesy our disasters and the wars against the Goths when he said: 'Therefore, thou son of man, prophesy and say to Gog: Thus saith the Lord God: Shalt thou not know, in that day, when my people of Israel shall dwell securely? And thou shalt come out of thy place from the northern parts, thou and many peoples with thee, all of them riding upon horses, a great company and a mighty army. And thou shalt come upon my people of Israel like a cloud to cover the earth. Thou shalt be in the latter days . . .' (Ezech, xxxviii, 14 sq.).

⁵⁷ *De Fide*, II, xvi, 136 sq. (*P. L.*, xvi, 611).

⁵⁸ Duc de Broglie, *Saint Ambroise*, p. 28.

This Gog is the Goth,⁵⁹ whom already we have seen rising up, and over whom victory is promised to us according to the Lord's own words. For they 'shall make a prey of them to whom they had been a prey, and they shall rob those that robbed them, saith the Lord God. And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will give unto Gog [in other words the Goths] a noted place, the sepulchre in Israel of a multitude of men who marched towards the sea. He shall close up the opening of the valley and shall there crush Gog and all his multitude. And they shall call this place the valley of the multitude of God. And the House of Israel shall bury them in order to purify the earth' (Ezech. xxxix, 10 sq.). We cannot doubt, O holy Emperor, that we who have taken up the struggle against alien perfidy, shall benefit by the help given by the Catholic faith, which is so strong in your heart. For the divine indignation has already been shown in the fact that belief in the destinies of the Empire has been shaken for the first time in those very places where fidelity towards God had been violated.

"I will not recall the murders, the tortures, the exiles of confessors, nor the sees of pious bishops which have become the reward of traitors."⁶⁰ Have

⁵⁹ St. Jerome disputes the value of this comparison in the *Quaest. Hebraicae in Genesim* (Lagarde's ed.) Leipzig, 1868, p. 14), but does not mention the name of St. Ambrose.

⁶⁰ Meaning the apostate Arians.

we not heard that Thrace, Dacia, the regions bordering on the river Danube, Mysia and Valeria, the country of the Pannonians,—that all these frontiers with a like horror hear the sacrilegious cries and tumult of the barbarians? How could the Roman State remain secure when entrusted to such defenders?

“But now, Sire, reverse this state of affairs and unfold the standards of the faith. This time they are not the eagles of the army, nor the flight of birds which are to lead our forces: it is the name and religion of Jesus. The country it is setting forth to defend is not a land of unbelievers, but a country from which many confessors have issued, Italy, threatened so often, but never made to blench by anything, Italy which you defended before against a barbarian enemy, and from whom again to-day you have delivered her! In this, O Emperor, there is no ever fleeting intention: the faith dwells immovably in her heart.

“Give them no uncertain mark of your majesty by making him who regards you as the true God of armies and of the heavenly militia, merit the trophies of his faith!”

The *De Pænitentia*, written between the years 380 and 390,⁶¹ is directed against the

⁶¹ In his commentary on Psalm xxxvii, which dates, at the earliest, from 395, St. Ambrose recalls that a few years before

partisans of Novatian. He was, as we know, a contemporary of St. Cyprian. Very much in evidence among the Roman clergy, to whom he belonged, he was designated on two occasions to give expression to the views of his *confrères* on the question of the *lapsi*; xxx and xxxvi in the collection of St. Cyprian's letters are both from the pen of Novatian. They bear the impress of a spirit of inflexible rigidity, hostile to all tempering concession. Spurred on by the wounds inflicted on his *amour propre*, he came, soon after, to accentuate his rigorism to such an extent that the bulk of the bishops, including St. Cyprian himself, found it impossible to make common cause with him. Basing himself on certain texts in the Gospels,⁶² he formally contested the Church's right to reconcile the *lapsi*, without, however, underrating, as it seems, the satisfying character of their penance. He was successively excommunicated by several councils at Rome and at Carthage. But his party sur-

he had written two books on Penance (*"De paenitentia duos iam dudum scripsi libellos,"* § I: *P. L.*, xiv, 1009). On the other hand, in the *De Paenitentia*, II, viii, 73, he wrote: *Quia et ego laborem aliquem pro sancta ecclesia tua suscepi*, which implies that already he had some years of his episcopate behind him.

⁶² Cf. Cyprian, *Ep.*, xlv, 3.

vived him for a long time. Nearly 130 years later we see from St. Ambrose's *De Paenitentia* that the Bishop of Milan judged it necessary to combat in detail the doctrines bequeathed by Novatian to his disciples.

In the first book St. Ambrose claims the absolute right of the Church to bind and loose sins, and refutes the arguments deduced by the Novatians from certain texts of Scripture. The purpose of the second book is to emphasise the necessity of penance for expiation and pardon. In reality St. Ambrose had no idea of whittling down in any way the just satisfaction necessary for the obliteration of sins. But his temperate and fair mind caused him to feel keenly the imprudence of the Novatian attitude, and the danger of the apparently heroic demands which that sect did not fear to proclaim.

THE GOOD EFFECTS OF MODERATION ⁶³

"If, included in the ends of virtue, the highest is that which aims at the progress of the greatest number of men, moderation, I make bold to say, is the highest of all. It does not wound even

⁶³ *De Paen.*, I, i, i (*P. L.*, xvi, 485).

those whom it condemns; but renders them worthy of pardon. Moderation alone has propagated the Church, which was ransomed by the blood of the Lord. She imitates the beneficent action of heaven, and, desirous of the redemption of all, seeks to avoid rendering the ears of men timid, or to crush the spirit or discourage their hearts. . . . Our Lord Jesus Christ had pity on us, in order to draw us to Him, not to turn us away. He came, gentle and humble, with these words: 'Come to me, all you that labour, and are burdened, and I will refresh you' (Matth. xi, 28). Christ, therefore, is He that repairs us, not one who shuts us out or rejects us. So, too, He made choice of disciples who, interpreting the will of their Master, took pains to attract His people and not to repulse them. They are not His true heirs who substitute harshness for gentleness, pride for humility. These ask compassion of the Lord and refuse it to others. Of such are those Novatian doctors who call themselves 'pure.' What pride is theirs, when Scripture tells us: 'No one is pure of all sin, not even the child of one day old,' and when David cries: 'Cleanse me from my sin' (Ps. L, 5); are these men, therefore, more holy than David, from whose line Christ chose to be born in the mystery of the Incarnation? What could be more barbarous than to prescribe a penance to which no term is given? Does not the refusal to pardon take away the best incentive to repentance? No one is ca-

pable of making a real repentance without some little hope of indulgence. . . .”

THE CHURCH AS THE AUTHORISED INTER-
PRETER OF THE DIVINE WILL ⁶⁴

“They claim to be emphasizing their respect towards God by reserving to Him alone the power of remitting sins. They are doing Him, very much on the contrary, the worst injury, for they are mutilating His commandments and evading the duty He has imposed on us. The Lord Jesus said in His Gospel: ‘Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them: and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained’ (John xx, 22-23). Who, then, does the greater honour to Him—he who obeys His commands, or he who resists them?

“The Church indeed manifests her obedience in both cases, whether she retains or whether she forgives sin. *Their* heresy is a cruel one in the one case, and disobedient in the other. It means to bind in order to loose no more; it does not purpose to loose what it has bound. It condemns itself by its own sentence in the same breath. In reality the Lord willed that there should be an equal right to bind and to loose, and He sanctioned both rights under equal con-

⁶⁴ *De Poenit.*, I, ii, 6 (*P. L.*, xvi, 487).

ditions. Therefore he who has no right to loose has not the right to bind. In the Lord's own words, he who has the right to bind has also the right to loose; consequently they are strangled by their own affirmation; since they refuse the right to loose, they must also refuse the right to bind. The one goes with the other. And the right to both has been delivered to the Church and refused to heresy. For these rights are given to priests alone. The Church, therefore, claims them with justice, since she has real priests, while heresy has not. . . .

"They turn round and say that if they exclude grievous sins from pardon they do grant it to lesser faults. This was not the teaching of your master, Novatian. He indeed judged that no one should be admitted to penance: his point of view was that he might not bind what he conceived himself incapable of loosing, from the fear that when binding he might be giving some hope of unloosing it one day. You are therefore bringing condemnation on the founder of your sect, for you admit a distinction between sins which are capable of being remitted and those which are without any remedy. God made no such distinction. He promised His compassion to all and granted to His priests permission to loose without making any exception. But he who has committed a more grievous sin must also fulfil a severer penance; for the most copious tears are needed to wash away the greatest sins."

A PICTURE OF REAL PENANCE ⁶⁵

"It is vain for you to pretend to extol penance when you suppress its results. Men only give themselves up to evil from a hope of reward or some advantage. . . . I desire, therefore, the guilty man to hope for his pardon, to beg for it with tears and lamentations, in which the entire people will join. If his re-instatement is put off two or three times, let him think that his entreaties have been too faint; let him redouble his tears; let him become still more unhappy; let him embrace the feet of the faithful and hug them still closer, in order that of him, too, the Lord Jesus may be able to say: 'Many sins are forgiven her because she hath loved much' (Luke vii, 47). I have seen penitents whose tears had hollowed a furrow on their faces, and who prostrated themselves on the ground to be trampled upon by the feet of every one; their pale faces, worn by fasts, exhibited the image of death in a living body."

PRIVATE PENANCE

As is natural in a polemical treatise accompanied by moral exhortations, St. Ambrose is not very explicit as to the precise forms in which the Sacrament of Penance was administered in his time. Nevertheless, certain Catho-

⁶⁵ *De Poenit.*, II, i, 5 (*P. L.*, xvi, 517).

lic theologians have seen in the two following extracts an allusion to private penance:

“Let us not blush to acknowledge our sins to the Lord. There is a feeling of shame in bringing our sins to light (*pudor est ut unusquisque crimina sua prodat*), but this shame tills the field of the sinner, tears up the ever living thorns, cuts down the briars, and causes the fruit to ripen, which was believed to be already destroyed.”⁶⁶

“Is it unbearable that you should blush to implore God, when you do not blush to implore a man; that you are ashamed to beg of God, who knows you, when you have no shame in confessing your sins to a man who does not know you (*pudeat te Deo supplicare, quem non lates, cum te non pudeat peccata tua homini, quem lateas, confiteri*). Are you afraid of having witnesses or spectators of your entreaties? But when it is a question of appeasing a man, you need to multiply your intrigues and supplications to decide people to intervene. . . . And do you disdain to do the same thing in the Church in order to entreat God, in order to be deserving of the people adding their prayers for you! The only shame you need have is in refusing to confess. Are we not all sinners?”⁶⁷

⁶⁶ *De Paenit.*, II, i, 5 (*P. L.*, xvi, 517).

⁶⁷ *De Paenit.*, II, x, 91 (*P. L.*, xvi, 540). St. Ambrose is recommending the practice of public penance.

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